The work of positional leaders in Communities of Learning.

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ABSTRACT

Communities of Learning (CoL) form one part of New Zealand's 2014 educational improvement strategy, 'Investing in Educational Success'. CoL are a government school reform strategy that aims to employ collective capacity to share resources, increase teacher capability and raise student achievement. The CoL structure is underpinned by a philosophy where excellent leaders adopt collaborative interdependent structures to transform education by influencing their colleagues' schools.

The government established CoL as a system improvement model to share expertise, develop collaborative practice and reduce disparity in minoritised groups. CoL are usually made up of eight to twelve member schools that reflect students' geographical pathways through the education system. The government believes that if CoL create a basis of collaborative expertise, students will experience streamlined transitions between schools, minority ethnicities will achieve at the same rates as European ethnicities, and that failing schools will improve.

Three new CoL leadership tiers have been created for positional leaders to work within their schools and across organisational boundaries to influence their colleagues and effect these changes in schools. This work presents unique challenges and tensions for leaders and the member schools they work in. CoL schools are expected to engage in partnering school communities, establish combined systemic groupings, reorganise their leadership structures and share resourcing. However, due to the relatively recent establishment of CoL, little is known about how positional leaders carry out this work in schools. This research examines the expectations of positional leaders, their work in light of the National Criteria for CoL and leaders' perceptions of their challenges and successes.

GLOSSARY

Word/term	Meaning
Community of Learning	Groups of geographically close education and training providers that form around students learning pathways to improve outcomes
Kāhui Ako	Māori name for Community of Learning, kāhui - cluster, ako - learn
Decile	A reflection of the percentage of a school's students that live in low socio-economic or poorer communities. Lower decile schools have more students living in poorer communities.
Māori	Indigenous New Zealander
Pakeha	New Zealander of European descent
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi - New Zealand's founding document
Te reo	Māori language

Abbreviation

CoL	Community of Learning, Communities of Learning
MoE	Ministry of Education, New Zealand
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Rationale

My study will focus on the work of positional leaders in New Zealand Communities of Learning (CoL). More specifically, it seeks to understand how this government reform model is interpreted and organised across schools and to explore the challenges of positional leaders during the development phase of implementation.

My interest in this research stems from my previous and ongoing involvement in CoL and a desire to reduce disparity in the achievement of minority cultures. New Zealand's decision to fund a decentralised reform that encourages promoting schools to solve self-identified local problems, supported by the Ministry, is a refreshing consideration to many working in the system. However, it brings previously unexperienced challenges to New Zealand educators. Schools entering CoL need to negotiate restructuring, adapt policy to represent collective needs and develop genuinely collaborative outlooks. This is new work for school leaders and education administrators who have to accept they will not see the impact of their work for many years. Peterson (2001) sums up the work of educators working in this field as they venture into the unknown: 'Let us proudly declare: we don't yet know what works, but we're committed to figuring it out, the best we can, along the way.'

New Zealand's new reform model has links to other OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) models. It is based on a body of international research that suggests the outcomes will not only produce improvements from the past, but the potential exists to produce transformational changes to education across this small country. Many aspects of the New Zealand design are unique and ambitious. They require changes to how educationalists think, what they value and how they lead. With the acceptance of autonomy comes the responsibility to develop internal propulsion mechanisms that unleash leaders who will affect change. Given the relatively new formation of CoL, there are few national examples of how positional leaders influence their colleagues in this context. It is, therefore, appropriate to examine the work of positional leaders at this time.

The findings of this research will benefit current and prospective positional leaders by providing information about how CoL make decisions and lead for change during the development phase. It will provide new CoL insight that was not previously available and may open up new areas of research in this area.

Researcher

As the researcher, it is important to consider my background and influences as I situate myself within this study. I approach this research with the experiences of a middle-aged Pakeha (European) woman, from a middle-class background. I am a wife and mother, who has worked in education for thirty years. I entered teaching in my early twenties and travelled to the United Kingdom three years later.

I have taught in small to large primary schools across varied socio-economic groupings in New Zealand and the United Kingdom and held senior leadership positions for the last twenty years. My approach to education has been influenced by my proximity to disadvantaged minority groups from a young age. I was further influenced by two female teaching relatives who positioned themselves to improve education for disadvantaged students and their communities. Locating myself across diverse schooling environments further reinforced my commitment toward social justice.

This research examines the role of Community of Learning leaders. I have been involved in CoL as a member school and as a Lead Principal. The work is important to me as a school leader working to implement and adapt school reform policy for the best outcomes of my community.

Reform Name Change

In 2014, the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated Communities of Schools, which were later revised to be called Communities of Learning. Commonly, CoL are now referred to as Kāhui Ako, a Māori Te Reo translation meaning cluster of learners. While I use Kāhui Ako in my daily life, for clarity and continuity in this study, I have used CoL as an acronym for both singular and plural Community and Communities of Learning.

Research Aims and Questions

The aims of this research study are:
1. To examine the expectations of positional leaders with respect to their role in Communities of Learning.
2. To examine positional leaders' practices in light of the National Criteria for Communities of Learning.
3. To investigate how positional leaders perceive their challenges and successes within Communities of Learning.

The research questions that guided this study are:
1. What are the expectations of positional leaders with respect to their role in Communities of Learning?
2. How do positional leaders' practices compare to the National Criteria for Communities of Learning?
3. How do positional leaders perceive their challenges and successes within Communities of Learning?

Setting the Scene – Reform Designed to Reduce Disparity

Global school reform strategies have been driven by a cultural need to reduce disparity within each education system. In New Zealand, Māori and Pacific student achievement is below that of Pakeha. Over the last twelve years, policymakers have worked to improve educational outcomes for minoritised students and increase equality. A revised curriculum, intervention programmes and several reform strategies were considered before the formation of CoL.

A new New Zealand Curriculum was issued as a statement of official policy relating to teaching and learning in New Zealand schools in 2007. It responded to the pace of social change, the sophistication of technology, the complex demands of the workplace and the increasingly diverse population (New Zealand Curriculum, 2007). This document aimed for schools to review and design their curriculum in relation to their local context and needs while prioritising Māori learners, giving 'effect to the partnership that is at the core of our nation's founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi' (p. 6).

The MoE designed intervention programmes to support schools to directly improve the achievement of Māori and Pacific Island students. These programmes (Ka Hikitia, Pasifika Education Plan, Te Kotahitanga, Kia Eke Panuku) encouraged schools to consider how marginalised learners retain their identities while being successful in their schooling. The documents supported the elimination of deficit thinking and the use of strength-based approaches when teaching ethnic minorities. They were supported by district administrators and expert personnel. However, overall these students do not attain the same academic levels as Pakeha students and remain 'target' students in schools across New Zealand.

Ongoing discussions and negotiations between the MoE and teachers' trade unions have worked to understand what is needed to reduce disparity and support teachers in the contemporary educational landscape. In 2007 the teachers' trade union, New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) pursued career pathways through collective bargaining. In 2013, the MoE initiated joint sector work to establish teaching career pathways to raise the status and value of the profession. At the time, the MoE proposed the change of policy would be received positively amid national collaborations to support victims of the Christchurch earthquake, Andreas Schleicher's (Secretary-General, OECD) visit to advise on education policy, and a strategic window that fell outside trade union bargaining cycles. 'A package of initiatives is already in train which form the start of the culture change required to professionalise improvement in the quality of teaching' (Ministry of Education, 2013, July 26). The MoE then applied Singapore's Career Pathways Case Study as a basis for the proposed reform: Aotearoa New Zealand – The world's number one education system (2014, June). This included the recruitment of exceptional teachers and leaders to build quality throughout the system. 'In New Zealand a cultural shift is required, to professionalise quality improvement. We must establish the expectation that all teachers own and contribute to the quality of the profession' (Ministry of Education 2014, June).

The resulting reform addressed raising inequality by including a remuneration scheme to attract principals to 'schools that need the most' (Ministry of Education, n.d.). At the same time, New Zealand considered following in the footsteps of the United Kingdom, suggesting the appointment of mandated Change Principals (Ministry of Education, n.d.). However, the final iteration, Investing in Educational Success: Design and Implementation confirmed a national change in educational direction that would

employ alternative layers of leadership to raise teacher capacity and student achievement, and support transitions across partnership schools.

> The package of initiatives mobilises the highly effective practice we have within and across our education system, so that it can be shared and used more widely and consistently to support the students that need it most, particularly Māori, Pasifika, students with special education needs and those from low socio-economic backgrounds.
>
> Ministry of Education, 2014, November 26

At the end of 2014, expressions of interest were first sought from schools considering entering the new collective partnerships called Communities of Schools (later revised to Communities of Learning). The MoE described their vision to: "improve the system for the future, lift aspiration, raise educational achievement for every New Zealander" (Ministry of Education, 2015). This reform model aimed to place successful leaders across schools who would recognise and respond to educational challenges. They would develop the collective expertise required to advantage all learners while confronting the national need to reduce disparity. The work required by these change leaders has been considered by Berryman & Eley (2019) who explain that transformative leaders will successfully make intended reform changes when they adopt actions, within a context of self-review, that do not allow disparities in education to continue. Following the MoE's adoption of this new policy, the New Zealand Education Review Office (ERO) mirrored government commitment with renewed school audit requirements that focused on measuring the success of Māori learners before non-Māori.

Over the last five years, New Zealand schools have clustered to form CoL. In May 2019, 1,799 schools had joined to form 221 CoL representing 663,000 students across New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2019). Although the model is centrally funded and has multiple support structures in place, the formation of schools entering collaborative interdependent structures presents unique challenges and considerations. These are outlined in the following sections.

Networked Learning Communities

Over the last seventeen years, networked learning communities have underpinned national improvement strategies in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Singapore, Australia, Finland and Belgium. Increased global adoption has initiated discussions about the concerns, opportunities and challenges associated with this collaborative ideology.

One is that of collaboration and competition. CoL are founded on the idea of professionals working together to advantage the wider group. This involves teachers and schools deprivatising their practice and sharing expert teachers with each other. This ideology conflicts with schools who want to retain their advantage over others as they compete for roll size and reputation. Engaging schools who hold these views will be especially challenging for CoL leaders who are tasked with seeking the full engagement of its members as a precondition for developing collective capacity. This has already been considered by some researchers who ask us to consider competition and collaboration co-existing simultaneously, proposing that the existential threat of competition may in fact, act as an incentive for collaboration (Muijs and Rumyantseva, 2014) and more recently by Fullan (2016) who describes how leadership teams can use professional, social and human capital as leverage in schools.

The shift to form collaborative partnerships requires the escalation and mobilisation of new leadership tiers to effect change in schools. Through my involvement in CoL and exploration of the literature, it appears that these changes to social hierarchies threaten schools' autonomy (Armstrong, 2015) and risk undermining or displacing current staff members, especially during the initial stages of establishing goals and agreeing organisational structures. In New Zealand, senior leaders are being forced to consider where instructional leadership is located in schools. Prior to CoL, senior leadership teams saw themselves as having this role. However, CoL leaders have been tasked with enhancing schools' evaluative capacity, deepening pedagogy, coaching teachers and introducing responsive changes to the curriculum. Some senior leaders are comparing their role to that of the CoL leader, realising their work has become predominantly administration driven and feeling displaced and uncertain of their responsibilities. It will be important for CoL to establish, and in some cases repair, relationships with these senior staff for the ongoing benefits of their organisation and community. McNae & Cowie's (2017) work reinforces the need to focus on these

relationships as research theory is taken into practice: 'researchers partnering with teachers requires the support of school leaders, students and the school community' (p. 308).

Advocates for collaborative school partnerships endorse collective capacity as the primary driver of improvement across schools. However, there is no denying that this requires significant organisational restructuring and social reorganisation to mobilise system-level change. Penul & Farell (2016) explain that 'Partnerships are an infrastructure for turning the insight that reform is a social process into a systematic design for collaborative improvement that leverages the expertise and passion of both researchers and educators' (p. 2). Following schools' completion of formalities entering CoL, it is possibly the social reorganisation that is the most complex and challenging aspect of the work.

Social Reorganisation

Communities of Learning require social reorganisation across schools and the education sector. The social implications of belonging to a CoL require partnering school communities to shift their thinking from their individual schools to a combined outlook that benefits all learners. Schools must establish combined systemic groupings, reorganise their leadership structures and share resourcing. Seddon and Angus (2000) forecast the need for educational workers to 'accept responsibility for contributions to new ways of social organising' for the success of a future institutional design. They explain the importance of social constructions being first deconstructed, to allow ways of operating and solving complex problems together. It is expected that schools entering into long-standing relationships with CoL will use their combined networks and extensive resources to share knowledge to support learners as they transition through their learning pathway. Education workers need to move beyond the 'insular and competitive' to collaborate and harness collective capacity; they will need to think and behave in different ways.

Researchers in this area agree that changed ways of operating are required within partnering organisations. Seddon and Angus (2000) propose schools 'would need to accept responsibility for contributing to new ways of social organising and living, and for developing creative capacities linked to traditional educational touchstones of democracy and equity' (p. 168). A Networked Improvement Community model has

been considered and developed by Dolle, Gomez, Russell & Bryk (2013) using collaborative inquiry to develop relationships that lead to a continuous improvement process. They emphasise the importance of leaders engaging in new mindsets and practices: 'Faculty need to see themselves and be seen by others, as reflective practitioners engaged in the improvement and committed to working with other network members in trusting relationships around shared problems of practice' (p. 6).

The CoL model is founded on the identification and mobilisation of leaders across the system to implement change. It is intended that a combination of their intentional placement, applied expertise, and ability to navigate relationships and changing contexts, will result in successful outcomes. Bandura (2001) suggests leaders need to develop collective efficacy within groups of teachers as a mechanism to place themselves within organisations, effect change and deliver results.

Leaders Repositioned to Influence

The CoL model is underpinned by the philosophy that strategically placed leaders will form successful partnerships and develop collective capacity alongside their colleagues to improve student achievement. It is widely agreed (Fullan, 2011; Harris & Jones, 2010; Rubinstein, 2014) that modern collaborative reform strategies are premised on the theory that experienced leaders of high performing, self-improving schools can be influential with their peers. Positional leaders are employed and dispersed at three hierarchical levels within CoL systems to activate change. If these leaders are to be successful, it is essential that they understand how they can be most effective in these challenging roles.

Several researchers have considered the repositioning of leaders as influencers in organisations. Mumby and Fullan (2016) present a connected autonomy change principle where collaboration underpins organisational improvement. They suggest the direction of influence is altered, where leaders network horizontally and vertically to form relationships that enact change. In this 'leadership from the middle' approach, system leaders are responsible for transparently connecting with others to improve practices that develop collective efficacy across schools. Boylan (2016) approaches positioning from a different angle, promoting a 'lead from below' model. In this approach, teachers are involved in the process of leading on-the-ground change with peers. Leaders' actions are used to influence colleagues to take on facets of the

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desired change. Bolden (2001) on the other hand, adopts a distributed leadership approach in response to the project work completed in across-school organisations, preferring a hybrid configuration where leaders are mobilised in direct response to needs.

In schools, collective capacity is gained through teachers' involvement in projects to address challenges in their practice and context. Johnson (2016) summarises the concept: 'As teachers join together to solve problems and learn from one another, the school's instructional capacity becomes greater than the sum of its parts' (p. 15). Robinson (2017) discusses the need for leaders to first develop their individual capacity to build credibility with their colleagues, as leaders build relational trust when they use evidence to solve complex problems in a non-judgemental manner. Experienced school leaders are often competent in building relationships of trust; however, they find it challenging to maintain these when addressing difficult issues central to school improvement. Robinson et *al's*. (2016) study of social problem-solving detected deficits in educational leaders who displayed little openness to exploring differences, reconsidering their own views or use of validation strategies to test their beliefs. Their research determined that behavioural indicators are not sufficient alone to identify the cognitive mismatches that drive reasoning and propose the development of normative theory to support leaders. Armstrong (2015) shares concerns regarding support for leaders, explaining there is little knowledge about the process of change and maintenance of relationships as schools enter these structures and agreements. He outlined the need for school supports as they negotiate change, broker and nurture new relationships.

Due to the recent establishment of CoL, little is known about how positional leaders carry out this work in schools. As a relatively new entity, it is timely to examine the expectations of positional CoL leaders, their work in light of the National Criteria for their role, and the challenges they experience as they work to effect change across school communities.

Thesis Organisation

This thesis is organised into six chapters.

Chapter One

This chapter has presented an introduction to the research project. It describes the rationale for the project, introduces the researcher, lists the research aims and the research questions, and sets the scene for the study.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two investigates the literature reviewed in relation to the research themes. The work of positional leaders in Communities of Learning in New Zealand schools are at the centre of the literature review.

Chapter Three

The research methodology and design are examined in Chapter Three. The reasons for taking an interpretive epistemological position and a qualitative approach to the methodology, data collection and analysis are explained. This includes an outline of the research design, data analysis framework and a discussion of relevant validity and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four presents the research data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Themes emerging from the collected data are also identified.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five focuses on the findings based on the emerging themes. The key findings from the research project are critically examined and linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six concludes the thesis and contains a summary of the overall findings of the research investigation. Conclusions, final recommendations for future practice, possibilities for additional research and a review of the limitations of the research are included.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the focus of this thesis – the work of positional leaders in Communities of Learning. The chapter discusses two main themes as they relate to the work of positional leaders in New Zealand's relatively recent Communities of Learning school reform model. The two themes are: 1. School reform; 2. System leaders as levers of change.

In regard to the first theme of school reform, a number of sub-themes are explored: previous school reform, modern school reform and the New Zealand context.

The second theme, relating to system leaders as levers of change, generates further sub-themes that explore: positioning change, district administrators and school leaders' interpretation and alignment to government mandates.

School Reform

Introduction

Over the last four decades, there have been global attempts to improve student achievement and advance equity in schools. Reform across OECD countries have followed a similar path as governments have questioned previously failed implementation models, understood school capability levels, interpreted international testing results and become better informed through a broadened research base. Consequential reforms have been delivered to schools with varying degrees of prescription and external accountability. These waves of recent reform have required changes to school organisation, leadership, curricula and teacher delivery.

It is widely agreed that previous centrally controlled reforms have not resulted in the expected improvements at the school, regional or national levels. This has been termed the policy-practice gap. Following each wave of intervention, policymakers reviewed and built on learnings from the past to inform the next. Before considering today's shift to collaborative communities, and New Zealand's involvement in these, it is important to understand the reform strategies that preceded it.

Previous Reform Models

The leverage point for educational change has shifted. Barber (2002) describes this journey in his knowledge poor-rich, prescription-judgement matrix.
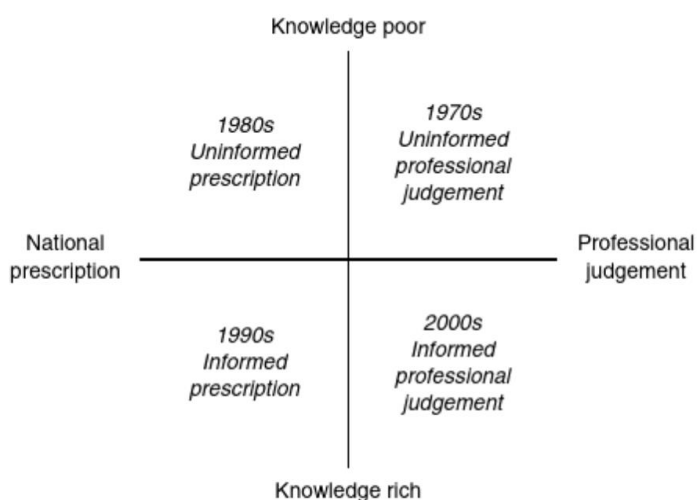
Figure 1: Knowledge poor-rich, prescription-judgement matrix (Barber, 2002)
Source: Fullan, 2003, p. 4

In the 1970s, schools generally made educational decisions with minimal external influence. Previous reforms across OECD countries had resulted in minimal change; it was this decade that saw the shift from internal decision-making to external accountability. Reform of this era was focused on increased access to education and greater equality (Finn,1991). Barber (2002) describes this as a period of 'uninformed professional judgement'.

As knowledge from this accountability model was gained, concerns regarding performance and accountability grew. In the 1980s, policymakers responded by defining standards and goals for schools. However, in this decade of 'uninformed prescription' schools did not necessarily have the resources to innovatively problem-solve or build internal capability themselves (Fullan, 2015).

The need for schools to access capability-building tools was rectified in the 1990s through 'informed prescription' where more carefully considered state-driven reforms, founded on research, were prescribed to schools. Whilst this model delivered some long-awaited improvements, concerns regarding its limitations ensued (Barber, 2007; Elmore 2002; Fullan, 2003).

Fullan (2003) refutes the longevity and side-effects of the narrow, centrally driven strategies, providing the initial nationwide success of the United Kingdom's 4-year National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (1997) as an example. Although it delivered improvements of 18% in literacy and 19% in numeracy across 19,000 primary schools, the last two years of implementation levelled off and staff morale declined. Fullan expounded that fundamental transformation is required to attain a learner- knowledge- and assessment-centred system: 'Informed prescription, the argument goes, can take us to the first horizon, but not much further. For deeper developments we need the creative energies and ownership of the teaching force and its leaders' (p. 5).

Clarification regarding the failings of this approach are provided by Barber (2007), explaining that system users will accept the command and control of prescriptive interventions as a solution to improve extreme underperformance. However, mandated reform is limited to surface-level improvements only, requiring transformational change based on system-wide creativity and motivation, 'You can mandate "awful" to "adequate," but you cannot mandate greatness, which must be unleashed' (p. 23-24).

Furthermore, Elmore (2002) asserts the disadvantages of the 1990s' distributive leadership model which divides and stretches knowledge and practice across roles rather than building an inherent team. In these instances, teachers receive specific content and skills for delivery; however, they are unaware of why they are doing them and unable to transfer practices across contexts. Schools working in this way are not acting as learning organisations that problem solve and increase overall capacity, 'That is, the solutions that schools are adopting have no rationale or connection to the actual learning of adults or students, no effect on organising work for learning, and no impact on how the school uses resources to support learning' (p. 22).

Recent global reform has been as much of a journey for policymakers as it has for district administrators and schools. Data from the implementation of prescriptive standards in the 1980s demonstrated the need to increase school capability. In the 1990s, evidence-informed teaching tools produced some promising results; however, supporting research highlighted the limitations of non-transferable skills. The result of twenty years of reform, international testing and access to research, has created the conditions for further change by working to advantage the greater majority (Smith & O'Day, 1991). At the beginning of the twenty first century, policymakers had realised that schools needed to become self-sustaining learning organisations that solved problems together by accessing resources and developing their own collective capabilities.

Modern School Reform

Over the last decade, several countries have adopted collaborative structures as a reform strategy to transform education. Government-driven models are being implemented across the United Kingdom, USA, Finland, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. Schools are encouraged to form affiliations with designated partner schools or networked groups of schools, under the leadership of a proven and experienced leader. It is widely agreed that this approach is premised on the theory that experienced leaders of high performing, self-improving schools can be influential with their peers (Fullan, 2011; Harris & Jones, 2010; Rubinstein, 2014).

Countries are using a range of partnerships and systemic leadership models to harness collective capacity to advance school performance. The degree of prescription

varies from mandated models, advantaged membership or opt-in voluntary partnerships. This sub-section provides a brief overview of collaborative structures across OECD countries and introduces the New Zealand context.

In England, school-to-school support is now the fundamental structure for school-led system improvement. Models include structured governance designs, designated leaders allocated to low performing schools and executive principal roles across several schools (Armstrong, 2015; ACSL, 2015).

Finland's governance decentralisation model and New Zealand's CoL provide optional government-funded collaborative initiatives. These allow schools to consider their local context and address diversity in their schools. They tend to promote tiered leadership structures that disseminate expertise and provide specified release time for leaders' participation in collaborative work (Hargreaves & Pont, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2016).

A further model is that of informal self-organised collaborative groupings, which have the advantage of allowing schools to retain the operation and decision-making of their own schools without collective accountability. However, they lack the funding and resourcing of centrally funded models. These groupings can find the demands of reorganisation and sustainability of a collaborative model challenging without financial support (Armstrong, 2015).

Policy makers are reorganising each country's organisational structures to support collaborative groupings. External voluntary and funded positions have been developed to strengthen formal collaborative structures. Schools have combined governance models such as formal Executive Boards or Stewardship Groups. Some groups of schools are beginning to share senior management positions and employ specialists outside the education sector to improve the efficiency of operational and management functions. Several countries have planned for experienced professionals to support and challenge those leading the communities. The United Kingdom provides 'exemplary' headteachers through the National Leaders of Education for this role, other countries provide an accreditation system.

Although schools began networking and developing collective capacity in the early 2000s, the formation and implementation phases of collaborative structures take several years. Due to the absence of sustained collaborative models there are few publications of outcomes or exemplary practice. However, the limited research base of initial models in the United Kingdom, USA and Wales indicate collaborative partnerships have positive effects on student learning (Armstrong 2015; Harris & Jones 2010; Rubinstein and McCarthy 2014), especially with students who are disadvantaged by their backgrounds.

The New Zealand Context

New Zealand's adoption of collaborative school structures took place in 2014 after observing the implementation of their counterparts abroad. What resulted was an invitational, yet advantaged model, where schools became central decision-makers. The New Zealand Government incentivises schools to collaborate by providing funding, recognition, remuneration and leaders' release from their primary in-school roles (Ministry of Education, 2016). The model aims to strengthen student pathways from Early Childhood to Tertiary, within schools that are geographically close. Member schools are supported by three internal tiers of leadership and externally by regional administrators and contracted support to develop collective capacity. Leadership tiers offer new career opportunities for professionals to remain in their classrooms and schools while they complete this additional work. Leaders collaborate to develop collective capacity horizontally and vertically across the networked groups and the education system. The in-school appointment of these roles provides each school with additional leadership opportunities to develop and promote staff, resulting in stronger professional capability. Member schools are also provided with release time for all teachers to inquire into aspects of their practice as researchers.

This model is reliant on strong, successful partnerships across schools and the education sector, alongside a shared desire and capacity to enhance performance collectively. The next section explores the capability of district administrators and school leaders to work in this way.

System Leaders as Levers of Change

The desire to create collaborative partnerships that develop collective capacity and achieve transformational system-wide change has been the most challenging reform in history. System workers are required to engage in ways that traverse traditional hierarchical tiers to solve problems together that profoundly affect education and outcomes for students. This section explores the complexities of this change and the challenges to key personnel as they perform their work.

Positioning Change

With each wave of school reform, the point of leverage and therefore the role of district administrators has changed. As Barber's (2002) matrix illustrates, 'national prescription' versus 'professional judgement' has been at the heart of change. A significant body of research now supports localised decision-making and accountability as an effective change model (Department for Education, 2010; Finn, 1991; Jensen & Clark, 2013).

Community of Learning schools are seen as well-positioned to effect change in their individual contexts; they know their unique community needs, are committed to improvement and well-placed to leverage change. Governments promoting collective reform believe decisions regarding the adaptation of localised curriculum and pedagogy are best situated at a school-site management level rather than central administration, 'That is how the diversity and vitality discovered by the "effective schools" researchers can take root in more communities' (Finn, 1991, p. 63). The shift from previous compliance-based reforms to schools becoming highly autonomous and self-accountable has reignited discussions about the role of regional administrators and their relationship with schools and school networks.

Educational Administrators

In the context of this study, the term educational administrators refer to regional staff who work across regions or sub-regions with CoL. The role of these education administrators is to support CoL to solve localised problems, engage collaboratively and develop collective capacity across member schools.

There is a concern that district administrators' previous work as 'compliance managers' of school reform does not provide them with the dispositions or skills to engage in

shared relationships or develop the complex collaborative structures necessary across multiple sites. While some educational administrators have been involved in collaborative partnerships with schools, others may have retained a proclivity for compliance from the centrally controlled eras of the past. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the capacity and outlook of these educationalists as they engage and perform key roles in collaboratively focused CoL. As Fullan (2003) challenged: '...does a decade of informed prescription create the preconditions for moving to informed professional judgement, or does it actually inhibit it by fostering external dependency?' (p.5).

The implementation of transformational reform, such as networked communities, requires stakeholders to work in different ways. It is highly likely that the implementing agents of government policy (district administrators and school leaders) will be required to significantly change their existing schemas (cognitive framework) to successfully complete this work. Those who successfully engage in reform, construct ideas about government policy that change their behaviours (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). District administrators in networked communities need to engage in contemporary and equal relationships with schools as they become the central-decision makers, while intentionally supporting their development. The level of success in these partnerships is dependent on both implementors, as they equally have the ability to enable or constrain progress.

An additional concern, regarding a carry-over from previous reform, is district administrators' inclination to prioritise student outcomes over evidenced continuous improvement. Peterson, Finn and Kanstroroom (2011) explain the potentially restricting nature of this, evidenced in America's NCLB (No Child Left Behind) reform. Mathematics achievement in American states, which did not previously have accountability systems, resulted in improvements; however, the focus to meet and deliver these systems became the focal point and instances exemplifying greater capacity were ignored. States that were in a position to go further than legal requirements felt constrained, 'the most convincing criticism of NCLB has come not from accountability sceptics but from states like Florida that were in a position to go beyond what the law requires but were forced to simplify their approach to comply with the law's mandates' (p. 63).

Whilst district administrators' experience transitional challenges, the role of intermediary authorities in providing strategic direction and instructional leadership to school leaders in the context of systemic educational reform is supported by several researchers (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Levin, 2012; Riley & Seashore, 2000; Rorrer et *al.* 2008). In networked learning communities, local district leaders can now be positioned to improve schooling and reduce disparity by working within school groups, whilst also from outside in their regional role. Their external position and skills allow them to support communities to establish policy coherence, reorient the organisation, provide instructional leadership and maintain an equity focus in what Rorrer et *al.* (2008) describe as institutional actors: 'an organized collective is bound by a web of interrelated and interdependent roles, responsibilities, and relationships that facilitate systemic reform' (p. 308). This is exemplified by the success of intermediary authorities across Local Education Authorities (LEA) in the United Kingdom who showed adaptive skills as they formed connections, embedded values, and worked in partnership within their strategic direction (Riley & Seashore Louis, 2000). The LEAs did not act as discrete entities but worked to interpret national policy while adapting to local contexts, 'These LEAs did not see themselves merely as agencies of central government – the means through which government policies could be transmitted to schools – but as organisations which re-interpreted those policies within the context of local aspirations' (p. 121).

This partnership and change of role have been considered by Honig and Hatch (2004), describing district administrators as multiple actors who craft coherence in an ongoing and dynamic process as they partner with schools. However, they caution the modern use of 'coherence' should not be mistaken for the previously compliance-based definition by school districts. This redefinition of policy coherence provides the adaptive expertise required to close the policy-practice gap. Examples of professionals working alongside schools in this way would include: 'schools setting school-wide goals and strategies that have particular features; schools using those goals and strategies to decide whether to bridge themselves to or buffer themselves from external demands; and school district central offices supporting these school-level processes' (p. 16).

Transformational changes required across school communities are complex and require deliberate planning. Although schools' intentions to deliver change is genuine, when unsupported, the fundamental elements can be reduced to 'the known' or

perception of 'safe'. Although CoL reform is a shift to school autonomy, several researchers agree that schools require external support to personalise, adapt and reconceptualise school reform (Finn, 1991; Miller, 1996).

Conceptualising the restructuring of pedagogies, curricula, and school organisations that change in purpose and form across educational settings and circumstances is complex. This can result in surface-level adaptations replicating previous work or narrowly focused developments that do not result in transferable changes in practice, '…however it often gets reduced to changes in school organization or scheduling patterns, or to teachers' adaptations of certain pedagogical practices' (Miller, 1996, p. 86-87). Schools are advised to take advice and apply patience when reconceptualising reform to fit their needs and culture.

Ironically, schools afforded the flexibility to make adaptations to school reform, can produce the opposite results. This is often represented by schools adopting common approaches that produce similar outcomes. In an effort to diagnose and design contextually relevant reform, communities can rush decision-making in a compulsion to show improvement and produce evidence. This phenomenon was observed by Corcoran, Fuhrman and Belcher (2001) while studying the roles played by central office staff members in shaping and supporting instrumental reforms in three large urban American districts. In these instances, schools facing uncertainty due to school reform felt they were unable to give the time required to major strategic decision-making or to encourage widespread adoption due to accountability, 'The pressure to do "something" and to raise scores made it difficult to proceed deliberately' (p. 3).

Schools can also be restrained by a reluctance or inability to select reform models based on research-based evidence (Corcoran, Fuhrman & Belcher, 2001), preferring interventions recommended by colleagues or which align with their own philosophies. In these cases, the preferred models were often perceived as easy to use and not threatening to current practice. These decision-making factors far outweighed the evidence of positive effects.

In evaluating the research of this sub-theme, there is a clear need for skilled, external personnel to work in enablement roles. Evidence supports the role of district administrators partnering with schools to clarify policy, interpret research, form

collaborative partnerships and enable contextually appropriate support in local communities. The current challenge is how district administrators and school leaders enact change together. Successful delivery will depend on each person's and sector's ability to work as equal partners: 'The best stewards of crafting coherence at school and district levels may be those who can tolerate and navigate such highly collaborative and interdependent terrain' (Honig & Hatch p. 28, 2004).

Leaders' Interpretation and Alignment to Government Mandates

While continuing to explore the importance of district-school partnerships, this sub-section explores how leaders interpret the demands made on them. CoL leaders are responsible for interpreting government policy and harnessing collective capacity to deliver improved results. It is the intentional positioning of these leaders to act as levers of change across their communities. This review of literature investigates leaders' personal alignment and response to external policies, and their interpretation of government mandates.

Leaders are most likely to interpret reform based on their previous experiences and existing schema. How leaders make sense of the policy's intent and how it is interpreted will depend on personal leadership practice and readiness for change. Majone & Wildavsky (1978) explain that leaders' interpretation of abstract policy, '...are subject to an infinite variety of contingencies, and they contain worlds of possible practical applications. What is in them depends on what is in us, and vice-versa' (p. 113). As previously discussed in this chapter, without deeper explanation or external support to reconceptualise reform, leaders are likely to apply what they already know.

A precursor for successful implementation is the alignment a leader has with the new policy. Seashore Louis and Robinson (2012) explored links between school leaders' perceptions of external policy and their instructional leadership behaviours in the United States of America. They found that leaders' responses to national mandates are determined by the degree of alignment with their current leadership beliefs and practices, and their confidence in district advisors to support them in achieving goals. Where alignment or support were missing, leaders demonstrated more negative attitudes towards external accountability and weaker instructional leadership resulted. Until recently, there has been little understanding of the phenomenology of change and what has been described by Seashore Louis & Robinson (2012) as a 'silence' in how

instructional leaders deliver change and achieve targets across schools and communities. Reforms have neglected to address how leaders actually experience change as different from how it might be intended, which has resulted in the failure of most school reforms (Fullan, 2015, p. 9).

There is a clear link between leaders' existing schema and their ability to affect change (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Fullan 2015; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) studied leaders as implementing agents of policy. Their work formulated a cognitive framework that brought transparency to the policy implementation process to analyse success or failure. They concluded that high-level school reforms require leaders to reorganise their existing schemas as they make sense of policy. As leaders engage with policy-makers' intentions, successful indicators included changing behaviours that evolved over time: 'A key dimension of the implementation process is whether, and in what ways, implementing agents come to understand their practice, potentially changing their beliefs and attitudes in the process' (p. 387).

The vertical and horizontal nature of leaders' work in CoL is pivotal to its success. 'The bottom-up perspective is also central, in that implementing agents' scripts or schemata, coupled with their situations, are fundamental constituting elements in the sense-making process' (Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002, p. 420). However, the requirement of immediate personal change while leading systemic reform alongside diverse groups across variable contexts is challenging. Change leaders are often required to perform sensemaking and make personal changes to their schema in public with little time to practise or condense their skills.

The leaders' role has additional layers of complexity found in the diverse nature of member schools and the frequently changing educational landscape, which bring further elements requiring interpretation and response. Fullan (2015) explains, 'All of this is further complicated because circumstances are constantly changing due to demographic, environmental, and other natural shifts, as well as deliberate policy attempts to improve the situation, which more often than not muddy the waters (p. 4).

It would be reasonable to assume the majority of CoL leaders work in the spirit of government policy, given the invitational nature of the New Zealand model. As leaders

grapple to understand the phenomenology of personal and collective change, it is important to understand the inhibitors to success. Spillane, Reiser and Reimer's (2002) cognitive framework Illuminated explanations for implementation failure, explaining that it is possible for leaders' perceived alignment with reform initiatives to ignore the policy's intent or make limited changes to their personal schema. Overconfident leaders may feel they already have the necessary capabilities and therefore do not engage deeply with new policy, 'If implementing agents construct understandings of the policy proposal that resonate with the policy's intent, they may ignore or adapt that understanding to advance their own agendas and, as a result, undermine the implementation of the Policy' (p. 420).

One of the reasons for failed implementation has been leaders working against policies, either intentionally or subconsciously. Whether leaders select only aspects they align with or intentionally ignore intended elements of reform: 'Teachers, district and school administrators, and other locals often fail to notice, intentionally ignore, or intentionally attend to policies, especially those that are inconsistent with their own agendas' (Spillane, 2009, p. 5).

As previously discussed, new reform requires leaders to change their behaviours and model new ways of operating across their CoL schools. CoL require leaders to interpret and respond to policy across member schools. Leaders who are better equipped to meet the demands of this reform show greater alignment with government mandates, accept the support of external educators to reconceptualise strategic direction, are able to transparently enact their new learning in front of others and critically appraise their delivery against new expectations.

Summary

The last four decades of educational reform have not effectively improved student achievement or advanced equity in schools (Barber, 2007). However, each wave of change has brought new knowledge and informed future direction. OECD countries have used reform reviews, student achievement data and an expanding research base to understand that centrally driven, prescriptive reform does not result in collective engagement, increased system capability or the generation of sustainable self-learning organisations that are required for transformational change.

Expanding literature supports the mobilisation of proven expert practitioners to influence their peers across groups of schools. Over the last decade, this evidence has led countries (United Kingdom, USA, Finland, Singapore and Australia) to adopt reform models founded on locally networked communities of schools (Elmore, 2002; Finn 1991; Fullan, 2003; Jensen & Clark, 2013). As a result, leaders of high performing, self-improving schools are being employed across the education system to influence their peers and lead change (Fullan, 2011; Harris & Jones, 2010, Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2014).

New Zealand has taken a considered approach in planning this reform after observing implementation models and the progress of early adopting countries. New Zealand's CoL model is designed to develop strong system partnerships that increase internal capability through an autonomous approach. The design is well supported by research in that it is invitational, has a tiered leadership structure with specified release (Hargreaves & Pont, 2007), provides centrally funded structures and supports (Armstrong, 2015) and is focused on developing collective expertise across the system (Elmore, 2002).

The literature supports policymakers to design reform that champions localised decision-making and accountability as a change model to engage schools in improvement (Finn, 1991). Research highlights the importance of selecting key personnel who have the dispositions and resilience as implementers of this change (Fullan, 2003; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002).

District administrators play an important bridging role with CoL. They are required to interpret policy, support organisational restructuring and ensure considered, evidence-based decision making (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Levin, 2012; Seashore & Riley; 2000, Rorrer et *al.*, 2008). However, they also pose a risk if they are not equipped to operate in this contemporary space. As a result of their involvement in previous top-down reforms, some district administrators may not have the skills required to partner equally, model collective capacity building or prioritise continuous improvement over immediate student achievement results (Peterson, Finn & Kanstroroom, 2011).

Likewise, the literature cautions on the selection and placement of positional school leaders as change implementers (Honig & Hatch, 2004). School leaders are more likely

to affect change if their existing schemas align more closely with policy and they have trust in their district administrators to support localised goals (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Fullan 2015; Seashore Louis & Robinson, 2012; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). Weaker alignment results in weaker leadership. We know that leaders working in new collaborative environments make sense of reform policies while simultaneously leading these changes in others (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002), across diverse schools and ever-changing contexts (Fullan, 2015). Leaders who will be most successful in navigating these complexities are those who can recognise their existing schemas alongside the change policies. Unfortunately, researchers have only recently begun to consider how leaders experience change as different to how it might be intended, which has been a reason for previous reform failure (Fullan, 2015).

Additional limiting factors emerging from the literature relate to school leaders' inconsistent use of evidence when adopting change strategies (Corcoran, Fuhrman & Belcher, 2001; Finn, 1991; Miller, 1996). Some leaders, either consciously or unconsciously, disregard intervention programmes which meet their needs. This takes place when leaders' overconfidence means they do not engage deeply with policy or when they are overwhelmed by the enormity of the journey and rush to adopt interventions that are 'comfortable' or 'known' rather than evidence-based and locally relevant. In these instances, leaders' non- or partial-alignment inhibits progress and achieves only surface-level change.

As networked communities are still in their infancy (Armstrong, 2015), there is limited research related to the progress and outcomes of collaborative partnerships. However, initial findings support positive outcomes for minority students. It is appropriate that this study adds to the literature in a country where there are grave concerns for minoritised students. Therefore, this study will examine:
1. The expectations of positional leaders in respect to their role in Communities of Learning?
2. How positional leaders' practices compare to those laid out in the National Criteria for New Zealand's Communities of Learning?
3. What challenges and successes positional leaders experience within CoL?

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology by presenting a rationale for adopting an interpretive epistemological position and a qualitative approach to the methodology, data collection and analysis. This includes an outline of the research design, data analysis framework and a discussion of validity and ethical considerations.

The study explores the work of positional leaders within established Communities of Learning in urban New Zealand schools. From 2014, the Ministry of Education offered schools the CoL reform structure based on locally grouped schools sharing resources to improve student achievement. Schools electing to participate in CoL receive additional resourcing. Funding and staffing provide three new tiers of leadership personnel across member schools who lead collaborative practices and deliver change initiatives. This study investigates the current work of these leaders in established CoL.

Qualitative Research

It was appropriate to apply a qualitative approach to this research. Qualitative methodology provides descriptive data of people's written or spoken words, and observable behaviours. Researchers use an inductive reasoning approach to understand the meanings people attach to things and form theories from these (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015). It is different from quantitative research which begins with a theory which works to confirm or disconfirm a hypothesis (Jha, 2008). Qualitative research allows the researcher the ability to explore participants' experiences. As educational research focuses on the context and application of teaching and learning with the aim of improving systems and practices (Mutch, 2013), it is important to investigate participants' descriptions and opinions about their experiences to formulate concluding theories. For example, to examine how and why learning has or hasn't occurred during educational interventions (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2013). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) support the flexibility required by qualitative researchers to examine important internal elements of phenomena as preferable to the constraints of external constructs where 'the research focuses on an emic perspective or the views of the people and their perceptions, meanings and interpretations' (p. 12). Conducting a

qualitative approach provides the ability to explore leaders' experiences to gain an understanding of what their work entails and the challenges that exist in their work.

Research Methodology

The research methodology had a post-positivist structure. Post-positivists support a worldview that is speculative, fluid and contestable. Researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2016) support this approach in seeking subjective data and representing multiple realities to substantiate their theories. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state 'post-positivism relies on multiple methods as a way of capturing as much reality as possible. At the same time, emphasis is placed on the discovery and verification of theories' (p. 14). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) agree, 'depending on the particular view of positivism that is being embraced - there exist multiple external realities or knowledge is regarded as subjective rather than objective' (p. 27). Creswell and Poth (2016) affirm this thinking: 'postpositivist researchers view inquiry as a series of logically related steps, believe in multiple perspectives from participants rather than a single reality, and espouse rigorous methods of qualitative data collection and analysis' (p. 23).

Creswell and Poth (2016) encourage researchers to extend this thinking by considering how data determines future events. Through investigating the impact and absence of decisions in social research the researcher is encouraged to 'recognise that all cause and effect is a probability that may or may not occur' (p. 23-24). This is an important consideration, as unplanned events or decisions 'not to act' by positional leaders across organisations may result in measurable positive or negative outcomes that determine future actions. A post-positivist approach to this research study allowed for the discovery of new theories by selecting flexible and contextually appropriate methods and exploring the concept of chance or inaction within the CoL context.

Research Design

An interpretive position guided the research design. The CoL phenomenon pertains to the social world of education - the work of teachers, leaders and schools. An interpretive approach sought to understand the perceptions and actions of participants. It allowed the researcher to form conceptions of theory and understand cultural behaviours from the collected data. Hua (2015) discusses the interpretive researcher's commitment to understand culture in its entirety, through situated observation and

description: 'Studies following this paradigm seek to uncover and interpret culture through the context where it exists' (p. xxvii-xxviii).

Social researchers explore participant experiences to understand the purpose of their actions. In these instances, participant behaviours are perceived as intentional, everchanging and future-oriented, often stemming from shared experiences. Meaning is constructed from evolving actions to build conceptions of theory. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) explain the complexity required to understand these 'behaviours with meaning' (p. 17) that include multiple interpretations, and the 'thick' descriptions required to explain their significance and meaning. Neuman (1994) suggests this complexity is captured in 'the systemic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds' (p. 68). This study explored the social and progressive actions of CoL leaders as they made decisions and worked in member schools to enact change. Adopting an interpretive position provided a framework in which to enquire into and understand the complexity of leaders' actions within the social phenomena of CoL.

Participant Selection

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select research participants. Typical case sampling ensured knowledgeable positional leaders from hierarchical tiers were equally represented. This sampling strategy accessed data representative of typical positional leaders and their current work in CoL. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) propose the use of purposive sampling when 'knowledgeable people' are required to inform the study: 'There is little benefit in seeking a random sample when most of the random sample may be largely ignorant of particular issues and unable to comment on matters of interest to the researcher' (p. 157). Through the application of typical case sampling, participants were selected that represented two of the three new tiers of positional leaders employed across Communities of Learning.

A small, yet representative number of participants were included in the research study. This allowed the research to traverse the breadth of leadership tiers across multiple CoL, while exploring aspects of the social phenomena in depth. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) advise researchers to examine the goal of their study and the required input from respondents before deciding the number of participants and 'consider

whether they are seeking in-depth responses, which would imply fewer participants, or breadth of opinion, which would imply more participants' (p. 316). The study intended to access participant data from three leadership tiers, across a minimum of three Communities of Learning resulting in nine participants. However, responses to the study resulted in seven participants being represented by: three Lead Principals and four Across School Leaders. No Within School Leaders replied to the study. This selection still allowed for different roles to be represented, similarities to be gathered and deeper cultural elements to be understood.

Participants belonged to CoL who had been working within the development phase for a minimum of one year. This information was requested from the Ministry of Education. Email contact was made with each CoL Stewardship Group, where they existed, to ascertain their willingness to grant permission for the research to be conducted within their CoL. Where a Stewardship Group of combined boards was not formed, direct contact with the Lead Principal was made to acquire appropriate contact details of the governing group. Once governance permission was granted, interested participants were invited to attend a CoL Leadership meeting where the study would be described, and potential participants recruited. This invitation was followed by an email to the Lead Principal explaining the study and inviting participants to make contact if they had been employed as a Lead Principal, Across School Leader or Within School Leader for at least one year.

Creswell and Poth (2016) explain that when ethnographic research acquires the majority of its data from talking with participants with specialised knowledge of a select culture or theme, 'access may require finding one or more individuals in the group who will allow the researcher in – a gatekeeper or key informants (or participants)' (p. 94). I planned to select respondents in order of their return communication if oversubscribed. However, due to the CoL focus on reducing the disparity of Māori and Pacific Island student achievement, I allowed for the prioritisation of participants to represent these priority groups and communities. Mutch (2013) describes the importance of researchers 'making space' to bring Māori voices into the study (p. 68) and the need for research in Māori and Pacific contexts to follow appropriate cultural processes and respect their individual world views (p. 71). The inclusion of Māori and Pacific Island participants would add value to this study, as the Ministry of Education's

primary goal for CoL, as a school reform strategy, is to raise achievement in marginalised cultures.

Participants were recruited outside of my previous or present CoL. This allowed an outsider's view that avoided unconscious bias or compromising relationships. There are strengths and disadvantages to working within one's organisation or setting. Bryman (2012) describes the privilege of an insider's view, supporting researchers to understand the unique attributes and formation of culture over time when working and researching within their own space:

> The researcher's prolonged immersion in a social setting would seem to make him or her better equipped to see as others see. The participant observer is in much closer contact with people for a longer period of time; also he or she participates in many of the same kinds of activity as the members of the social setting being studied… It is often the 'argot' – the special uses of words and slang – that is important to penetrate that culture. (Bryman, 2012, p. 494)

However, there are significant disadvantages in applying an insider's view in the CoL context. These include potential role conflict, gaining detailed knowledge of colleagues and a new-found insider knowledge that could lead to a lack of objectivity (Mutch, 2013). When considering the strengths, limitations and disadvantages of the insider's and outsider's views, I determined that conducting the research outside of my CoL was advisable to avoid harm to others, their organisations or to risk jeopardising the research.

Compromises also needed to be made when considering interviews as the sole data collection method. Undoubtedly, conducting multiple observations could have provided a deeper understanding of participant context in understanding the larger phenomena and everyday working context of participants. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) agree that 'Observation is a method for understanding how individuals construct their realities' (p. 292). However, interviews allow for the exploration of participants' understanding and views on a phenomenon. Bryman (2012) explains the advantages of qualitative interviews over observations, proposing that some events are not possible to observe, and that the reconstruction of events does not always allow for participant review and reflection. Interviews, on the other hand, allow the researcher to explore a topic with a

participant when there is only one opportunity to meet and allow the researcher to shift from a general to specific focus within a limited time frame. Interviews have the advantage of being less intrusive, allow for longitudinal research and greater breadth of coverage with a specific focus. When considering the aims and questions of this study, it was deemed unfeasible to conduct observations of CoL leaders across several multi-member organisations. It was therefore appropriate to narrow the focus by interviewing positional leaders as the instigators of CoL change initiatives and 'gatekeepers' of culture.

Once participants were confirmed, it was important to understand the cultural protocols of participants and their organisations. In addition to the varied ethnic cultural protocols of participants, it was expected that each CoL would have their own values and way of operating. Mutch (2013) advises 'using consultation and reflection at each stage of the process to enhance research in cultural settings outside of one's own' (p. 87).

Data Collection

The study sought to obtain data describing CoL leaders' work and the challenges of their leadership role. Therefore, it was appropriate to conduct one-to-one semi-structured interviews with each of the seven leaders to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of CoL work from a participant perspective (Mutch, 2013).

The researched aimed to be conducted across a minimum of four Communities of Learning in New Zealand that were in the developing phase of operating, as described in Communities of Learning On-The-Ground change (2017, August). As the researcher conducting the semi-structured interviews, I knew the identity of the seven participants.

Participants participated in a 45-60 minute interview in their school, at a time that was convenient to them. This was planned to take place during directed working hours or, if preferred by the participant, during a school holiday period. If it was not possible to ensure privacy in the participant's workplace, a mutually agreed neutral venue could be decided as an alternative. This could be another CoL school.

The school principal provided organisational consent for their employees to participate in the research and permission for the research to be conducted in their school.

Interviews were digitally recorded and details regarding the recording included in the consent form. As the researcher, completed all transcriptions. Participants were provided with a copy of their digital recording for verification purposes.

Semi-Structured Individual Interview

Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate data collection approach to access the lived realities of leaders across several CoL. Interviews enabled participants to discuss their experiences and actions as leaders. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) explain that interviews allow participants to share their interpretations and express their own points of view, 'In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable' (p. 409).

Bryman (2012) explains that when the study has a 'fairly clear focus, rather than a general notion' that the researcher is likely to select a semi-structured interview 'so that more specific issues can be addressed' (p. 472). Creswell and Poth (2016) agree that phenomenological studies applying semi-structured interviews allow a narrow focus on the lived realities of participants, 'the important point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it' (p. 161).

A semi-structured interview process allowed the interview to be individually responsive to participants when exploring their unique experiences, while also covering the pre-determined questions in the interview schedule. Researchers (Mutch, 2013; Bryman, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2016) support the use of planned open-ended questions to collect phenological data. Bryman (2012) advises a balance, whereby questions guide the process while not limiting the uncovering and exploration of participant's experiences.

> The formulation of the research question(s) should not be so specific that alternative avenues of enquiry that might arise during the collection of fieldwork data are closed off…what is crucial is that the questioning allows interviews to glean the ways in which research participants view their social world and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the interviews. (p. 473)

Resolving Field Issues

Field work involves gathering information in participants' setting or context. This study used semi-structured interviews to collect data. It was understood that unexpected issues may arise when undertaking fieldwork that require resolution. Therefore, it was appropriate to consider how issues could be resolved.

Researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) suggest anticipating and reviewing the participant-researcher relationship to minimise field issues and to prepare for unknown or unexpected events. Creswell & Poth (2016) suggest prompting researchers to consider relationship management alongside the mechanics of interview questions and recording devices. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) agree, advising the researcher to apply reflection and reflexivity associated with processes and products associated with their study. Whilst speculative reflection is useful, it is a researcher's reflexivity – their ability to understand their position and influence which causes 'self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher' (p. 76).

Recording Information

Accurate representation of audible data is the first step in the analysis process. Therefore, an audio recording device was used to capture participant interviews in their entirety. The audio transcript allowed the researcher to maintain a comprehensive record of the interview, allowing repeated opportunities to review the data and select relevant content for the purpose of the study.

Transcript writing was completed manually by the researcher using a hand and ear recording method. Transcriptions recorded participant answers verbatim and provide contextual verbal and behavioural information that could be analytically relevant at a later stage. These included pronounced actions, significant pauses, laughter or lowering of voice. The narrative transcriptions were held on a secure computer for easy retrieval and coding.

Interpreting Data

An interpretive framework was used to analyse transcribed data and generate theories through a phenomenological lens.

Codes were applied to transcribed data to identify emergent ideas and themes in a 'lead coding' approach, described by Creswell and Poth (2013, p. 184-185). Interpretation involved counting the frequency of codes to assess the strength of participant interest across emergent categories using a non-biased calculation, which gave equal emphasis to data.

Initial qualitative data was classified into phenomenological themes that portrayed multiple perspectives related to the categories. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) explain that the aim is 'to move from description to explanation and theory generation' (p. 539). The researcher completed a process involving a systematic series of analysis, coding and categorisation, until a theory emerged that explained the phenomena.

Creswell & Poth (2016) explain the complexity and cyclic review involved in the data analysis phases which involves the preparation and organisation of data, identification of themes and final representation of findings for display or discussion, 'These steps are interconnected and form a spiral of activities all related to the analysis and representation of the data' (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 181). The researcher amalgamated data and abstract meaning through continued expansions and reviews of the accumulated data which combined participants' views and explored insights.

Validity and Reliability

Mutch (2013) reminds qualitative researchers to ensure their work is trustworthy (demonstrating consistently ethical approaches) and credible (examining and confirming collected data). The interviewer should be open to understanding the views and lived reality of the participant, ensuring their questions, tone and attitude do not deliver preconceived notions or leading questions. Interviews should maintain the intended direction based on set questions, while exploring relevant discussions.

Bryman (2012) asserts that social research should establish face validity: 'that the measure apparently reflects the content of the concept in question' (p. 171). Reliability can be enhanced through good-quality tape recording and consistent transcription and coding (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Testing internal reliability in the interpretation of themes and application of coding was an important consideration.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest minimising bias the most practical solution to achieving greater validity and that this can largely be achieved by addressing the characteristics of the interviewer, participant and content of the questions. Bias can be minimised through highly controlled and inflexible questions. However, this does not allow for individual views or experience to be explored.

Representing the Data

The project was reported in such a way that the identities of participants were not known. Participants' anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonyms to represent the individuals. Details relating to participants' or their CoL geographical location within New Zealand were removed. Creswell & Poth (2016) suggest researchers represent a composite picture of the individual being studied.

Storing Data

I ensured anonymity and the protection of the identity of participants, schools and CoL. 'All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 218). Data has been stored in the form of audio recordings. Interview transcripts were stored in a password protected computer. The password is only known to myself as the researcher. Signed consent forms have stored in the office of the principal supervisor in a locked filing cabinet separate to audio recordings and print transcripts. The principal supervisor, associate supervisor and I have access to the data and consent forms from the study. Access to data and consent forms are only be possible with a password and consent via the principal supervisor. Data from the study are kept for five years and remain the responsibility of the principal supervisor.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting qualitative social research in the context of the CoL reform structure requires careful ethical considerations to ensure participant and researcher safety. Processes were required to protect identities, treat people with respect and to make terms of agreement clear (Savin-Badin and Major, 2013).

Participants were principal and teacher-leaders working in established CoL who signed a consent form prior to the research. The consent form included an opt-out clause indicating that participants are aware of the withdrawal limitations. Their participation

required organisational and individual consent that necessitated propositions to stakeholders and conditions to be negotiated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The study openly and transparently provided participants with information about the nature of the study to allow them to consider possible implications and to make informed decisions about their involvement. Individuals participated on a voluntary basis, without coercion and could withdraw without consequence if required. A written consent form allowed participants to be fully informed of the research's intent and possible implications. However, Bryman (2012) advises caution in regard to the exploratory and unknown nature of qualitative research, 'the direction of qualitative studies can be somewhat less predictable than with quantitative ones, so it is difficult to be specific within forms about some issues' (p. 140). It was, therefore, important to maintain a researcher stance that was sensitive to participants and their organisations.

It is not appropriate for research to cause harm. An important consideration was how harm could be minimised through the researcher's stance, participant context and the research processes, as the study progressed. Kumar (2014) defines minimal risk in that, 'the extent of harm or discomfort is not greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life' (p. 286), further explaining the researcher has an ethical obligation to prevent participants from feeling anxious or harassed.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) caution that research in communities or school life can entail additional risks, in that the observation and examination of these groups may not be appreciated by some members who could feel threatened, advising researchers that 'investigators must at all times manifest a sensitive appreciation of their hosts' and subjects' position and reassure anyone who feels threatened by the work' (p. 83).

Participants were protected from feeling that their privacy had been invaded. They were only asked about issues relating to the aims of the study and may have chosen not to answer questions if they did not feel uncomfortable.

The participants were not deceived in any way. The research aims and methods were discussed with each participant. Individuals had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and methods in the study at any time. Information relating to these were not withheld.

In order to ensure that I respected the rights, confidentiality and preservation of anonymity, I sought participants from CoL other than my own. If, in spite of efforts to remove any likelihood of association between a participant and my CoL and a conflict of interest arose, then I planned to openly discuss this with the participant and would have negotiated a way of managing this that did not compromise either of our interests. If the conflict could be resolved, then I planned to invite that participant to withdraw from the study. Savin-Badin and Major (2013) highlight the ethical importance of social research being underpinned by strong goals and objectives, explaining there is less likelihood of unethical mistakes when a study is focused on forming knowledge from participants, 'studies should be designed so that they explore new concepts and ideas, and have a goal of moving research, theory and, arguably, practice forward' (p. 333).

Communities of Learning are still relatively new in New Zealand. There is only a small amount of research or information related to their work or outcomes. The intent of CoL is that it will cause changes in practices and school systems. The nature of change across school organisations is new, complex and multi-layered. These issues call for sensitivity to be applied to research processes which must be transparent, protect participant privacy and anonymity, and minimise harm.

Cultural and Social Sensitivity

The findings from this research may be controversial and not well received. CoL are relatively new and only a small amount of information is currently available on their progress and development. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) discuss the potential for tensions to arise when researchers are confronted with dilemmas in their research. In these instances, researchers are required to resolve them in a balanced manner that maintains the welfare of participants while allowing the continuation of the research, 'Researchers should never lose sight of the obligations they owe to those who are helping and should constantly be alert to the alternative techniques should the ones they are employing at the time prove controversial' (p. 86).

Communities of Learning sit within a political platform of educational reform. Bryman (2012) cautions that politics has the potential to influence researchers' ethical decision-making. Their neutrality may be compromised by taking sides when issues such as negotiated funding provisions, access to information, restricted publication or use of findings for political gain exist. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) acknowledge the complexity

of employing neutral research principles, advising a moral approach to resolve ethical judgements in social research, 'compassion and nurturance resolve conflicting responsibilities among people, standards totally opposite of merely avoiding harm' (p. 224).

As there was potential for politics to manifest itself within research in this area of CoL, it was important to adopt an impartial stance that objectively managed data while valuing the participants and intent of the research.

If support was required, I planned to access this through the research supervisor and Māori Advisors (available through the MoE) for advice and guidance throughout the study. They could provide advice and guidance regarding Māori participation, the positioning of my research in the New Zealand context and the necessary considerations due to the impact and potential effect of this CoL research for Māori achievement.

Research that is intended to improve practice across CoL include all education sectors (Early Learning to Tertiary). This research could both directly or indirectly have an impact on Māori because there are likely to be Māori students and staff in these contexts. The research could have implications for future practices by education workers in current and emerging CoL that could involve Māori students.

Limitation of Deception

The research study worked to avoid deception through sustained transparency and open communication about the research aims and methods used throughout the process.

Participants and organisations were provided with written information pertaining to the study. Consent forms were provided, with additional details related to data gathering methods and analysis. Individuals were made aware of their ability to withdraw from the study, should they have requested this. Participants were provided with a copy of the recorded transcript of their interview and time to respond or correct any errors of fact.

The final thesis was made available after examination and a copy offered to each participant. The research findings are included as a Master of Applied Practice thesis which has been published online through the Unitec Research Bank, following its successful completion. Participants in the study were invited to view the thesis online. An electronic link was sent to each participant.

Summary

This qualitative research applied an interpretive approach to understand and explore the work and experiences of positional leaders in CoL. The data analysis framework was guided by a phenomenological approach that sought to construct knowledge and generate theories.

The researcher applied a considered and respectful stance towards participants and the research process to maintain safety, acknowledge cultural sensitivities, minimise fieldwork issues, and protect data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, data from seven interviews are presented and analysed. The chapter commences with a brief description of how the data is structured and presented, followed by a section detailing the research findings.

The purposes of the interviews were to:

1. Establish information regarding participants' roles in their CoL.
2. Investigate participants' alignment with external mandates.
3. Investigate participants' expectations of their roles.
4. Investigate the work of positional leaders in their CoL.
5. Investigate how knowledge transfer and leading learning with peers is being approached in CoL.
6. Investigate teachers as leaders across CoL.
7. Investigate the challenges and successes of positional leaders in CoL at this time.

Structure and Data Presentation

Interview data was structured to explore the purposes, as listed above. The questions were designed to explore each purpose and were grouped accordingly (see Appendix B).

Two participants requested access to the questions prior to the interview, in order to prepare and consider their responses. Therefore, to ensure consistency, all participants were sent the Interview Schedule via email and provided with a hard copy at the beginning of the interview. As participants may not have read the questions beforehand, the questions were read to participants and further explanation provided as required.

The data is presented in both tabular and narrative form, in the same order as the Interview Schedule. Where appropriate, participants' responses have been combined, condensed and summarised to provide a succinct representation of the data and avoid

repetition. Participant pseudonyms have been applied to maintain anonymity. The participants are labelled as P1 to P7 in the tables and quotation of their responses.

Findings

Section One

The initial interview questions (1a - 1h) explored participants' backgrounds, their individual school and CoL context. These questions allowed participants to introduce themselves and their leadership role. The data has been grouped and summarised to preface findings in the questions that follow later in the chapter.

Questions 1a - 1c investigate participants' leadership in their CoL.

Question 1a: What is your role in your CoL?

Question 1b: How long have you been in this role?

Question 1c: How many schools does your CoL include?

Table 4.1: Participant information - educational leadership role

Participant	CoL role	Length of time in CoL role	Number of schools in CoL
P1	Across School Leader	1.5 < 3 years	> 10
P2	Across School Leader	1.5 < 3 years	> 10
P3	Across School Leader	1.5 < 3 years	> 10 including ELC
P4	Across School Leader	< 18 months	5 < 10
P5	Lead Principal	1.5 < 3 years	5 < 10
P6	Lead Principal	< 18 months	5 < 10
P7	Lead Principal	> 3 years	> 10 including ELC

ELC = Early Learning Centre

The study included seven participants across two leadership tiers of the CoL. Of the seven, three were Lead Principals and four were Across School Leaders. This study does not include Within School Leaders.

The study's participants represent four established urban New Zealand CoL in the implementation phase of development. Participants have been employed in their roles between nine months and three years. Three participants were employed in their role at the inception of their CoL and have entered a second term of appointment. One participant is newly employed to an established CoL and three participants are completing their first two-year term.

The four CoL represented by participants are medium to large in size, ranging from seven to twelve member schools. Two CoL have formally included Early Learning Centres in their Memorandum of Understanding.

Question 1d: Is your CoL unique in any way?
. A table has not been used to display this data in order to preserve anonymity.

The research participants identified the unique characteristics of their CoL to be aspects related to geographical spread, provision of academic pathway for students, cultural diversity and the non-competitive nature of their CoL schools.

Interview questions (1e - 1h) investigate participants' own school context.

Question 1e: What type of school do you work in?

Question 1f: What is the student roll size of your school?

Question 1g: What role do you have in your school?

Question 1h: What involvement do other leaders and teachers in your school have in the CoL?

Table 4.2: Participant information - school context

Participant	Type of own school	Roll size of own school	Role in own school (students)	Other CoL leaders in school
P1	Primary School	200 - 500	Specialist Teacher	2
P2	Intermediate School	750 - 1,000	Head of Curriculum area	4
P3	Full Primary School	200 - 500	Middle Manager	1
P4	Primary School	200 - 500	Middle Manager	2
P5	Secondary School	750 - 1,000	Principal	3
P6	Primary School	200 - 500	Principal	1
P7	Intermediate School	200 - 500	Principal	1

Primary School – Year 1-6
Full Primary School – Year 1-8
Intermediate School – Year 7-8

Participants represented a range of schooling sectors and contexts. Their individual schools ranged in size from 250 – 1,000 students. Five participants worked in relatively small to medium sized schools with student roll sizes of 200 – 500 and two participants worked in large schools of approximately 1,000. Four participants worked in Primary Schools (one in a full primary school catering for Year 7 and Year 8 students), two

participants worked in Intermediate Schools (Year 7 and 8 students only), and one participant worked in a single-sex Secondary School.

Participants' schools included a spread of demographic contexts, cultural representation and special character (with State-Integrated designation). Schools ranged from Decile 3 - Decile 10. Two participants worked in faith-based schools. One school discussed the consistently diverse cultural representation across its CoL schools; children in these schools represented at least twenty-three different cultures. Two schools discussed the high number of immigrant English as a Second Language learners across its CoL schools.

The Across School Leader role requires teachers to maintain direct classroom contact with students for most of each week. Participants in Across School Leader roles all hold middle management leadership responsibilities in their schools. Two participants work in mainstream (general) classroom contexts, one works in a specialist teacher role and another has temporarily relinquished their Senior Leadership role in order to access the Across School Leader position.

All participants have between one to four additional CoL leaders working in their school. Three Across School Leaders have Within School Leaders employed at their school. One Across School Leader has the Lead Principal in their school.

Questions 2a - 2d investigate participants' alignment with external mandates.

Question 2a: What do you understand to be the Ministry of Education's expectation of you in your CoL role?

Table 4.3: Participants' understanding on the Ministry of Education's expectation of leadership role

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Increase student outcomes	1	1	1		1		1	5
Increase capability and build systemic collaborative capability			1	1	1		1	5
Deliver and report on strategic direction						1	1	2
Achievement Challenge targets		1			1		1	3

Participants were asked to describe the expectations of their leadership role.

Five participants understood their leadership role was to increase student progress and achievement. In most instances, these participants elaborated on leadership actions that contributed towards this.

Five participants discussed the work of increasing leadership, teacher capability and building collaborative capability in colleagues. One Lead Principal described the role of strengthening student pathways between primary and secondary schools through the creation of a collaborative group of member schools:

> "I guess the way I see it is to provide leadership within our pathway and make sure that pathway is effective, and work with the other principals and the other schools to ensure that there is some consistency, some efficiency, a shared belief system and collective teacher efficacy…" (Participant 7)

An Across School Leader described that their positional leadership allowed them to influence change across schools:

> "As an Across School Leader my CoL role is really to support teacher improvement of practice that will then have an impact on student outcomes. I think the Ministry see us as quiet little powerhouses going round inspiring,

encouraging, developing, spreading the word - as facilitators of change."
(Participant 3)

In addition to responses regarding leadership roles, three participants commented on the Ministry-approved Achievement Challenge targets compiled at the formation of their CoL. These participants felt restricted by the requirement of numerical targets in core curriculum areas which prevented the focus in areas such as pedagogy, the wider curriculum or wellbeing. Participants also shared concerns about outdated targets based on large groups of students that were no longer in their school or CoL.

One participant described the challenges of showing accelerated student achievement data in a two-year intermediate school within a transient community:

> "So we're doing it at the beginning of 2016, using 2014 data. Those kids were long gone and because of our pathway, half of them weren't even at the college." (Participant 7)

Another participant explained that recent collaborative work amongst member schools highlighted more important needs than those committed to in the initial data audit:

> "They're not irrelevant but we certainly don't focus on them. So the initiatives that we've got now do not directly relate to our achievement challenges. We've chosen not to update the Achievement Challenges yet; we will at some point. They were really narrow... and it didn't really align with the strategic direction of the schools by the time we put them into action a couple of years later." (Participant 2)

One Lead Principal welcomed a current government shift in accepting more diverse Achievement Challenge targets that reflected the collective needs of member schools:

> "Well, I think that's changed a little bit because with [previous Education Minister] it was all about lifting achievement. I suppose it still is, but the change has been all about collaboration - actually working collaboratively rather than working in competition." (Participant Five)

Question 2b: Do your personal values and preferences align with the national direction of CoL?

Table 4.4: Participants' personal alignment with the direction of CoL

Yes. Five participants stated their personal alignment with the direction of CoL.								
Reason for alignment	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**	**TOTAL**
Reflective practice	1							1
Positional influence	1							1
Inquiry driven		1						1
Collaborative			1		1			2
Student achievement focused				1				1
High expectations					1			1
No or not stated. Two participants shared concerns about the direction of CoL. One participant stated they did not align. One participant did not state their alignment.								
No alternative career pathway						1		1
Reliance on funding						1		1
Pay parity concerns across leadership						1		1
Workload						1		1
Induction of new staff						1		1
Narrow achievement targets							1	1
Conflicting priorities between Ministry and member schools							1	1

Participants were asked if their personal values and preferences aligned with the national direction of CoL. Five participants affirmed their alignment with the direction of CoL. Their reasons included the focus on improved student achievement and delivering change through modern approaches such as collaboration and adopting inquiry models.

One Across School Leader described their enthusiasm in leading collaborative practices to leverage change:

> "I've been teaching in a number of environments and a number of years, but for me collaboration is just huge. How you learn from each other and inspire each other and tag-team with each other, you know, and bounce ideas off each other? My best years of teaching would have been when I've worked in a collaborative space, so doing this on a bigger scale. I've done quite a bit of reading on collaboration and collaborative teaching and I think the more we come out of little silos and the more we interact; we build on each other's expertise." (Participant Three)

The opportunity to develop personal change leadership strategies based on educational theories was valued by one Across School Leader:

> "...you know, that sort of taking their theoretical base and putting it into practice, but not in a, "Come to a staff meeting on a Monday afternoon and someone's gonna talk to you for an hour," but that life-long learner, self-improvement, spiral of inquiry stuff… and part of that is defining my own ideals of education leadership and what I think leadership in an education setting should look like. Which is really cool." (Participant Two)

Two Lead Principals shared concerns about the CoL model. Their concerns included the sustainability of the model beyond initial government funding, leader workload, pay parity and conflicting priorities.

One Lead Principal felt conflicted between delivering Ministry stated goals while honouring their member schools' differing priorities:

> "That was one of the tensions I felt. I had Ministry here going, "You've got to do this, you've got to do that." And I had the principals here going, "But we want to do this, we want to do this!" We still need to be accountable for this - we're getting this money; we're getting these roles. So that was interesting." (Participant Seven)

Another Lead Principal described concerns that their role required more than a single person was able to manage, without compromising the leadership of their own school. They were also concerned there were no alternative career pathways for CoL leaders, as was originally expected:

> "Running a school is like a 24/7 job and then you're doing this! And you're doing this as a service to your colleagues, but it's like a service that you don't want to do long term. So in that term, it's not a career path." (Participant Six)

An Across School Leader expressed similar disappointment that an alternative career path was not apparent for CoL leaders. This participant valued leading others while

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maintaining their classroom teacher role. However, they were unclear about future opportunities:

> "Maybe when I've had enough of being in a classroom then I can look at more traditional leadership roles but it's nice to be able to have that balance of both." (Participant Two)

One Lead Principal was concerned that the remuneration and teacher-release components attached to leadership roles were not equitable when measured against senior leadership positions in schools:

> "...the Across School roles are funded almost the same, if not higher, than DPs in the primary school. So we did have a situation where my Across School Leader was earning more than my Assistant Principal and you know, I think that's a disparity… there is tension, I really think that (was) something that wasn't considered when the model was put together." (Participant Six)

Another Lead Principal had experienced changes in CoL leadership and discussed the challenges of induction across schools:

> "I'm just a little bit worried about the sustainability of it too, in terms of people come and go… part of what we're doing is we're trying to put systems in place so that when new people come in they can assimilate quite quickly but that takes the efforts of all the schools and really we need to write a lot of CoL things into our strategic direction, which goes without saying anyway. It just seems as though we made it up on the hop. Like the first two years were very much like finding our way. I think we're getting stronger now, but we're like three years into it. No, I don't think it was a good model at all. I think it's been quite wasteful." (Participant Six)

Question 2c: Do the systemic tiers of your CoL (Combined Boards, Schools, Leaders, Teachers) have similar expectations of you and the work you do?

Table 4.5: Shared expectations of participants' work

Yes. Four participants agreed the systemic tiers of their CoL had similar expectations of their work. One participant partially agreed.								
Reason for alignment	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**	**TOTAL**
Focus from formation							1	1
Consequent area of focus	1		1	1				3
Two participants were unsure if the systemic tiers of their CoL had similar expectations of their work. One participant partially agreed.								
Completion of Strategic Direction						1		1
Consequent area of focus		1			1			2

Participants were asked if the systemic tiers of their CoL had similar expectations of their work. Four participants explained the systemic tiers of their CoL had similar expectations of their work. One participant attributed the positive systemic alignment to the prioritisation of stakeholder engagement during the formation stage of their CoL.

> "Right from the get-go we involved the boards and boards had to be involved. So we've had quite a few Super Board meetings where we've got everyone together." (Participant Seven)

Three participants explained their systemic alignment was instigated by turning points which had prompted the need for change. One of the three participants had engaged a Ministry funded external specialist to support the alignment process once challenges were apparent.

One Across School Leader described a turning point that had shifted a group of previously distant principals to be engaged in collective planning:

> "So we had about a year of really just feeling our way in the dark. We hadn't read those Domain Maps at that point to get any guidance. So our first year was really spent quite floating around and with us trying to devise an Action Plan… look at the data and come up with what we thought we wanted to do. Then we presented the Action Plan to the principals and it was "Oh, Hello?" They were surprised and slightly stunned by what we were suggesting. So we stopped, regrouped and they actually got more involved and started working

out what they wanted for their schools and combining into a better structure. So, not to start off with, but now we're doing it together." (Participant Three)

Three participants were unsure about the shared expectations of their leadership role or described partial systemic alignment. One participant had taken over the role from a predecessor and was working with member school principals to revise the strategic plan. The two other participants described a current focus following turning points. One of these was an Across School Leader who described the challenges of instigating change across schools from a middle leadership position:

"There's always a balance between essentially the work that we want to do and we're trying to implement, and then ultimately a principal and the associated board are in charge of the strategic direction of the school and it's marrying these two things up – that's the complicated bit sometimes. We've definitely had to make compromises to what we wanted to do to match up with the strategic direction, otherwise it's not going to be a workable solution." (Participant Two)

Two participants explained they had responded to similar concerns by broadening the provision of available professional development opportunities to accommodate all schools. In these instances, participants felt the change was now resulting in widespread engagement.

One participant was comfortable with the limited involvement of their combined schools' Boards. This participant felt their Boards wanted to know what was happening but, as it was focused on the work of management rather than governance, their direction wasn't required:

"...so you want them to be supportive, but you don't want them to actually think, 'Well actually, we can tell you what we want you to do or direct that." (Participant Five)

Question 2d: Have you been able to adapt the National Expectations to your own CoL context and needs?

Table 4.6: Participants' ability to adapt National Expectations

Adaption	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Focus on enabling strategies	1		1	1	1		1	5
Collective dialogue to guide direction		1						1
Measurement tools						1		1

Participants were asked if they had been able to adapt the National Expectations to their own CoL context and needs. All participants explained that their CoL had adapted the initial national expectations to meet their own needs.

Five participants discussed 'moving away' from their Ministry of Education-approved Achievement Challenge. Their new work involved supporting teachers to develop collective inquiry or pedagogical approaches that better met the needs of their staff, students and schools. The changes resulted from the increasing dialogue between leaders and schools as the CoL developed and better understood their collective and individual needs.

One Lead Principal explained their deepened understanding of schools' needs as they progressed through their journey together. The corresponding flexibility of Ministry expectations affirmed their needs-based decisions:

> "Initially we went with the national expectations solely and now we're pulling away from it because we're finding what's unique to our area and with the support of the Ministry. We've realigned our goals and reset them. So I know the national expectations have actually become more flexible and I've been to several workshops and things and it's allowing us to develop our direction more to suit us. So in terms of that, I don't find them as constraining as they were. I'm finding it's getting better." (Participant Six)

Five participants discussed focusing on self-identified enabling drivers rather than subject-specific achievement challenges. One Across School Leader described the success of a pedagogically-based professional development approach involving teachers from different schools, sectors and subject-specific specialisations:

"We actually went from student needs first... where you saw the greatest need within your group of students and that's where we started from. Then we were able to formulate this goal that did transfer across these different contexts. It's been very powerful. I've had a lot of really good feedback from the people within the team and they also said the same, "How on earth are we going to make this work?" But we did and the research actually supported all of the different contexts they worked in because it was more pedagogical in context." (Participant Four)

One participant discussed a shift from traditional student testing to using stakeholder voice and attitudinal data to measure progress:

"Now we're looking at other things like voices from students, parents and teachers, and comparing voices and attitude change and that sort of thing. Which is probably more relevant to us." (Participant Six)

One participant's CoL was supported by an external specialist to interpret CoL data and plan work relevant to its context:

"The Expert Partner has really been helpful with that. We sort of weaved the National Expectations with our expectations of our faith-based learning. That's been really good to weave that in. So it is definitely the direction of the principals and the governance group." (Participant Four)

Section Three

Questions in this section investigate people's expectations of CoL leadership roles.

Question 3a: What were your expectations of your Community of Learning role?

Table 4.7: Participants' expectation of their leadership role

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Specialist job description	1							1
Unsure		1	1					2
Enhance relationships				1				1
Collaborative approach				1			1	2
Develop pathways to support student transitions				1			1	2
Deliver professional learning				1			1	2
Develop leadership and lead learning					1		1	2
Effect Achievement Challenges					1		1	2
Organisational structures and roles					1			1
Form Theory of Improvement					1			1
Develop Strategic Direction						1		1
Access funding							1	1

Participants were asked to comment on their own expectations of the leadership role. The table shows that five participants had a clear understanding of their work.

One participant explained that their role had been different from others as it had a narrow specialist focus created to support one aspect of the CoL:

> "I was one of the first who had a job description because mine was written for me when they realised that they needed someone like me with data analysis skills and with digital communication. So my job description was very clear; the others were not." (Participant One)

Two Across School Leaders did not have clarity about what the work entailed when they began. One participant recounted their positive feelings as they ventured into the unknown:

> "I didn't really know, there was nothing to compare it to. We started, we looked around the table at each other thinking we're going to be leaders… We didn't really know, it was just exciting and different." (Participant Three)

Another participant described the process of writing their job description:

"I had no idea – not a clue. In fact we spent months trying to write a role for our position so that we were clear what we were supposed to be doing, what the expectations were. How we would know when we've been successful in our role." (Participant Two)

One participant had observed a colleague in the Across School role and was inspired by the opportunities it provided for professional development, collaboration and improving opportunities for students:

"I'd been observing the other Across School Leader, prior to my appointment. I really felt a bit resentful of the time that she had for professional development, the time she had for reading, and I was haring around like a headless chicken trying to do my (management) role and teach and actually there was an element of, "I really want to have a go at this." (Participant Four)

The three lead principals had clear expectations around their role, which they described as creating structures, employing and developing leaders, creating student pathways between schools, leading learning and creating a Theory of Improvement to meet the Achievement Challenge targets.

One Lead Principal had initially expected to continue the work of a previous colleague. However, after two years the CoL felt a stage of review and redefinition was appropriate:

"I thought I'd just take over and carry on (from predecessor) but actually what happened was very different because I came at a point of change. Two years in, people wanted to review things. So I've actually found it, reviewing what we're doing a lot, and then setting a new direction." (Participant Six)

Another Lead Principal responded by describing two of the challenges associated with leading change:

"...we made a few missteps along the way and we had to sort of redress some of that stuff and I think at the end of the two years, one of the things that has come out is that a couple of the principals are getting a bit impatient because

they want to see what this delivers for the students and that's really hard… we can actually show what has happened for them as teachers – the changes in their practice, but it hasn't really spread much wider than those people because it is by invitation and it's really hard to get people… Like you're getting paid $8,000 to do this extra work, why would I bother to come into your group when you're going to get paid all this extra money and I'm not getting anything? So, the structures that come make it problematic." (Participant Five)

Question 3b: Are/were other people's expectations of your role different from your own?

Table 4.8: Alignment of leadership expectations

Yes								
Reason	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Participation was for employed staff only			1	1				2
Partially								
Expected previous delivery models					1		1	2
No								
Narrow job specification	1							1
Colleagues did not know what to expect		1						1
Previous involvement in group						1		1

Participants were asked if other's expectations of their role were different from their own. Three participants did not feel that others' expectations of their role were different from their own. In two cases the participants had been involved in discussing and forming the role prior to their appointment.

Two participants described colleagues who expected CoL leaders to follow past delivery models or top-down approaches. One Lead Principal shared their observations of a colleague as they attempted to facilitate a collaborative group:

"...I kind of get the impression that they think I know everything, which is kind of interesting because it's definitely not about that. My role is to facilitate the CoL, not be the, "Right, you're going to do everything this way!" (Participant Seven)

An Across School Leader explained the reaction of some colleagues to the new delivery model:

> "I think some people… imagining I'd be in there more, in individual classes. I didn't actually see myself going into classes, telling people what to do. I didn't feel qualified to do that." (Participant Three)

Two Across School Leaders described an awareness that some colleagues expected CoL work to be completed by employed positional leaders, as they received financial rewards, professional development opportunities and release time to complete the additional work:

> "We're very aware that there is a certain amount of resentment of the money that's been put into CoL and, "Oh, you get all the time off and get to go and have meetings here, there and everywhere"... That certainly is (the case) in all the schools, everybody - even the Within School Leaders would say the same thing, "Well you've got that money, you go ahead and do it." (Participant Four)

> "I know in some of the other schools, especially the secondary schools, there was a bit of grumbling about things that people were doing because of the rate of pay and things, but nobody ever seemed to resent what I was doing or grumble about it. I think that they just thought I looked rather busy actually." (Participant Three)

Questions in this section investigate the work of participants within their CoL.

Question 4a: Describe the CoL work/projects have you been involved in.

Table 4.9: Participants' work in their role

Project categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Communication	1			1				2
Developing leadership	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Developing teacher capability		1	1	1			1	4
Strategic review and planning						1		1
Forming a database of strengths						1		1

Participants were asked to describe the CoL work they had been involved in. The data table shows that all participants were involved in work that developed leadership capacity. Three of the Across School Leaders' projects extended to enhancing classroom teacher capability as a result of this leadership.

One Across School Leader described how their project had begun by first understanding the combined schools' leadership teams' brief, before building their own understanding, and then working with Within School Leaders and teachers to deliver development:

> "...How can we work with you to achieve what it is that you want from [project]? Why did you choose this initiative?" All of that stuff. From there, we essentially started off by taking some baseline data. We did spend a while doing a bit of research on what [project] is. What it looks like. We realised we were going to measure change over time. We created a matrix for what progression in [project] might look like. A working definition – we worked collaboratively to come up with both the working definition and the matrix." (Participant Two)

One Lead Principal discussed using a combination of outside providers and an internal strength-based approach to support the achievement of their Strategic Direction:

> "The first one was Culture Counts which was looking at relationships in terms of making sure that we related well to our students. That our students, across the schools, that the relationship between teacher and students were strengthened and cross-colleague, and also we looked at creating a database

so we could look at the skills that we have within our CoL so that we could internalise and use each other." (Participant Six)

One Across School Leader discussed their project which involved developing a communication platform for CoL leaders to share their work:

> "One of the things I've done is about sharing, about growing digital capabilities in the CoL... We've done a report (of) where we're at this year… you can see our strengths… we created a hangout where every initiative had a three-minute slot of presenting the year's work... Last year, as an Across School, I took four Across Schools to [conference] and they presented with me." (Participant One)

Question 4b: Has your work or the role you have with others changed as a by-product of your leadership in the CoL?

Table 4.10: Changes to participants' work or role

Yes. Four participants stated that their work or role had changed due to their CoL leadership.								
Reason	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Extended learning network		1	1			1		3
Stronger relationships		1						1
Emerging leaders request coaching		1	1	1				3
Attained promotion			1					1
Work across tiers as equals			1			1		2
Enhanced knowledge of educational developments			1					1
Appraisal changed to develop collaboration						1		1
No. Three participants stated that their work or role had not changed due to their CoL leadership.								
Observed leadership outcomes	1							1
Stronger relationships					1			1
Business continued as usual							1	1

Participants were asked if the role they had with others had changed as a by-product of their leadership. Four participants responded that their work or role with others had changed due to their leadership position. All participants described positive changes.

An Across School Leader described the shift from collegial relationships to learning relationships:

"Definitely my relationship with the In-School Leaders has improved. I mean, we had good collegial relations before, but I guess they're far more powerful now. Some of them actively come to me for coaching now. Which is cool – I love coaching and it works." (Participant Two)

An Across School Leader and Lead Principal described their broadened educational outlook, understanding of collaboration and ability to access learning horizontally from extended networks outside their school:

"I've gone so much broader – you stop thinking inside your classroom. You really start thinking wider about all of the research and theory about leadership and collaborative learning and teachers and their practice." (Participant Three)

"So, it's changed my outlook of leadership as not just being a top-down thing (which I know we try not to do, but it ends up that way sometimes), and looking at how you can lead across." (Participant Six)

Three participants did not feel that their work or role with others had changed. Two discussed observable results of their role such as leadership impacts and stronger relationships.

One Lead Principal described their increasingly positive relationship with Across School Leaders:

"Definitely with the Across Schools because I spend most of my time with them. There is sort of, how we work and interact and how we see each other. (It) is quite an interesting exercise of how we work." (Participant Five)

Question 4c: Are your interactions with others different due to your role? Have others' behaviours towards you changed?

Table 4.11: Changes in relationships in leadership role

Yes. One participant stated that interactions with others were different due to their leadership role.							
Reason	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Respect from a wider group of colleagues			1					1
No. Six participants stated that interactions with others were not different due to their leadership role.							
Specific leadership role	1							1
No additional response		1						1
Colleagues curious about the role				1				1
School commitment to retain previous responsibilities				1				1
In-school interactions declined due to across school leadership commitments				1				1
Relationships developed due to time and collaborative work					1		1	2
Positive transition due to member of group previously						1		1

Participants were asked if their interactions with others were different due to their role and if others' behaviours towards them had changed. One participant felt their relationships and interactions had changed due to their CoL role. This participant had observed increased respect from previous and new colleagues due to opportunities to engage with peers and as a result of the work they had been involved in:

> "I've got more respect from people within this school and I suppose other schools… You can't just waltz in with a badge on can you?... I've had very positive feedback… somebody wanted to come to a meeting so they saw how I ran the meeting – I couldn't believe it!" (Participant Three)

Six participants did not feel their interactions with others were different or that others' behaviours towards them had changed due to their CoL role. Most participants elaborated on their answers.

Two participants explained their relationships with colleagues had deepened and evolved as cooperative and collaborative work had taken place over time. One of these participants discussed the support of external experts to guide the CoL principals to work collaboratively towards their vision. This participant reflected:

"So maybe there's some ideas about how we might role model or go through the exercise ourselves or, "Here's a problem I've identified, how might we turn this into a collaborative inquiry to work on it?" (Participant Five).

Of specific note was an Across School Leader who described decreased staff interactions within their own school due to their CoL work. This participant discussed their principal's flexibility and commitment to adjust the timetable for the following year:

"I haven't been to staff meetings nearly all year because of the commitment to the CoL. There's been no, "I really need you here or need you there! You should be involved." Because I do feel I've missed out a little bit as far as school interactions have gone. So, we've certainly looked at that for next year; that won't happen again. But there was definitely no, "What's happening and why aren't you here?" (Participant Four)

Section Five

Questions in this section investigate how knowledge transfer and leading learning with peers is being approached in CoL.

Question 5a: How would you define the learners you work with within your 'community'?

Table 4.12: Participants' understanding of learners in their CoL

Project categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Students					1			1
Teachers	1	1	1	1		1		5
Leaders	1	1	1	1		1		5
Everyone							1	1

Participants were asked to define the learners in their 'community'. Five participants defined their learners as the leaders and all teachers. One participant described their learners as the students and one participant responded that everyone was a learner across their CoL.

Two participants explained that students across the CoL would be the recipients of their work, but their current focus concerned developing capacity in leaders and teachers:

"... the students are the ultimate beneficiaries of that, but that's not been our direct focus…" (Participant Two)

"Although we keep front and centre about student achievement, it's certainly about upskilling teachers and supporting teachers in order to support student learning." (Participant Four)

Another Across School Leader described the qualities of teachers as their learners:

"So, for me the learners are the teachers. How would I define them? They are mainly In School Leaders – they are enthusiastic, open to learning, they have a lot of learner agency (or teacher agency) because we learn with them. I use the growth coaching to encourage them to think rather than… it's very much learn together rather than tell, because I don't know anyway. Yes, excited and keen to be involved. Keen to go and try stuff." (Participant Three)

One participant described their learners as everyone; that all principals took part in professional development as a group and with their own staff. Boards were all present and involved, where appropriate:

"Everyone, even principals. We've all done the Education Growth Coaching… We hold each other to account a little bit which is really good." (Participant Seven)

Question 5b: How is knowledge transfer and learning organised across horizontal groups and organisational boundaries?

Table 4.13: Participants' learning delivery methods

Response categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Digital platform	1							1
Disseminated to teachers via leadership tiers	1	1		1	1		1	5
Knowledge constructed and spread vertically and horizontally			1					1
Planned meetings						1		1
Invitational workshops						1		1
External providers provide tiered approach							1	1

Participants were asked how knowledge transfer and learning is organised across horizontal groups and organisational boundaries. Five participants described a disseminated model to deliver learning, from leaders to leaders and leaders to teachers. Participants explained that focus areas were decided through each school's prioritisation of an Achievement Challenge target or identified enabler. One Lead Principal described the combined approach of leadership and external providers to support learning and knowledge transfer:

> "So, we've got different mechanisms… we've got our Across School Leaders working with In-School Leaders and the expectation is that In School Leaders go back out to their schools and do work with (schools), so they go back and they deliver that. We've also been lucky that (external provider) has a tiered system of professional development… It's a multi-tiered delivery system. Which is really good." (Participant Seven)

One participant described invitational learning opportunities in after school workshops:

> "... we have after school workshops periodically as topics come up and we need to do things, and they're usually hosted in different schools and run by the across school leaders." (Participant Six)

One participant explained that knowledge was constructed by Across School Leaders and spread horizontally to Within School Leaders and vertically across schools as they worked with teachers in Professional Learning Groups:

"So, because we've got the different initiatives – within our initiative learning and knowledge – we co-construct it. We spread it outwards from the middle to people in our schools. We're spreading it upwards to the principals and reporting to principals." (Participant Three)

Four participants volunteered challenges they had experienced when delivering learning across the CoL. These included administration concerns preventing teachers attending meetings (funding, timetabling, travel, prior commitments, accessing replacement teachers), communication, collaborative engagement and prioritisation of needs, and the ability of staff and external personnel in adjusting to the progress of the CoL.

One Across School Leader explained how a variety of issues led to challenges in meeting together with Within School Leaders to progress the work of the CoL:

"Schools sort of pull people in different directions, so that's one of the things with the communication, is we really need the principals on board to be really supportive of releasing those teachers and making sure they're there, but with the relief teacher shortage it's been a struggle this year." (Participant Four)

Section Six

Questions in this section investigate teachers as leaders in CoL.

Question 6a: What learning are you leading across your CoL?

Table 4.14: Participants leading learning – projects

Project categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Pedagogy	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Retention of students						1		1

Participants were asked to describe the learning they were leading across the CoL.

Of the seven participants, six were leading pedagogical learning across CoL schools. These included digital capability, teacher agency, reflective practice, collaborative inquiry, Visible Learning (Hattie & Yates, 2014) and early years' teaching. One of these Across School Leaders described their pedagogical work in developing Teacher Agency with teachers:

> "I'm leading learning about teachers as professionals, teachers as people who are inspired to reflect on their practice and to make modifications in order to keep on changing and adapting. So, it's learning about teachers themselves." (Participant Three)

In addition to pedagogical foci and strategic planning, one Lead Principal was leading a project to understand the movement of students outside the CoL schools' pathway in order to improve retention rates:

> "I'm looking at pathways at the moment. One of my big main things that I wanted to get to grips with was keeping children within our community." (Participant Six)

Question 6b: How do you situate and organise learning?

Table 4.15: Participants' organisation of learning across the CoL

Delivery method	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Face-to-face	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Digital platforms and tools	1	1	1					3

Participants were asked how learning was situated and organised. All participants discussed creating a variety of face-to-face learning opportunities. Four participants discussed using online platforms as a tool to organise learning. One Across School Leader described the value of building relationships in person while using digital tools:

"We've done stuff online, we've done the TeachMeet thing (that was wider), but within the actual CoL we've done face-to-face meetings, we'll do online stuff, we do emails, we do Goggle docs. We did a lot of face-to-face, particularly at the beginning, because we needed to build that community and no matter what people say, there's nothing like face-to-face in my opinion." (Participant Three)

One Across School Leader discussed the process of engaging schools through the Senior Leadership Team:

"With me it's about transparency and I go through the principals first. I have to, as you know, you have to get them on board before anything will happen in anybody's school. Then, we've also learnt to make sure the DPs are on board with us. That was a big learning curve for us... last year we knew we had to have the DPs on board cause in a lot of schools you've got your principals, but really it's the DPs that do the grunt." (Participant One)

Question 6c: Which types of learning are resulting in the most success? What are the indicators of this?

Table 4.16(a): Successful learning methods

Success	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Dissemination			1			1	1	3
Collaboration	1	1		1	1			4

Participants were asked to identify the learning that resulted in the most success. Three participants described a disseminated approach. One Across School Leader discussed the positive shift in teacher capability data which they attributed to a planned and sustained delivery process and use of a self-assessment tool:

> "So little and often - engaging with people. So it was just there all the time - it wasn't a one-off." (Participant Three)

Four participants identified the use of collaborative approaches as the most successful learning model. One Across School Leader described the impact of collaborative learning when leaders had been provided with clear outcomes, background research and the ability to make decisions relevant to their school context:

> "Face-to-face collaborative has been by far the most powerful. When we get that group of In-School Leaders together and we're clear about the purpose of that meeting, what we want as an outcome… Then they came up with all these ideas, they shared them, they adopted and modified other schools' ideas. They said, "We could take that, and change that, and it would work really well here." That stuff had the biggest impact." (Participant Two)

Table 4.16(b): Attributors to successful disseminated learning methods

Dissemination	CP	CH	MW
Attributor	Clear expectations	Clear expectations	Clear expectations
Measure	Data	Data	Data

Three participants attributed the success of learning methods to a disseminated approach. All participants credited the inclusion of explicit expectations within their methods. Clear expectations were contained in output tasks, teacher capability matrices, professional development and strategic plans. These successes were measured through observations, participant voice and capability data.

One participant discussed the shift in teacher capability data due to their disseminated approach:

"Massive growth across, in every school, but across the whole community. It was a really a good indicator of change." (Participant Seven)

Another participant described the collection of student voice to motivate teachers to change their practices:

"We've done a couple of surveys based on student voice and learning to learn what our learners need. So that would probably have been the most powerful thing." (Participant Six)

Table 4.16(c): Attributors to successful collaborative learning methods

Collaboration	P1	AN	JM	CA
Attributor	Clear expectations	Research	Inquiry Model	Clear expectations
		Clear expectations		
Measure	Data	Engagement	Data	Observations

Four participants attributed the success of learning methods to a collaborative approach. Participants described the use of research, inquiry models, clear expectations and collaborative practices. Success was measured through observations and numerical data.

One participant discussed their use of collaborative leadership strategies to effect successful change in schools:

"When you don't have that positional authority, you cannot lead by saying, "You've got to do this!" "Why? Why do I have to do that? You can't make me do that." And that's part of learning about our role I think; it's trying to learn that difference in situational leadership and generating a followership rather than dictating what you need." (Participant Two)

Another participant explained how their increased knowledge of data was supporting them to measure teacher capability:

"There's an awful lot of 'data-driven'… I've learnt a lot about data this year. So, if you're looking at the data from all the presentations that we saw two weeks ago, there's been success right across the board." (Participant Four)

Section Seven

Questions in this section investigate the challenges and successes of the participant's leadership role in their CoL.

Question 7a What are the challenges in your CoL role?

Question 7b Can you describe an example of this?

Table 4.17: Leadership – challenges

Challenges	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Communication	1		1	1				3
Staff turnover and induction	1						1	2
Patience in developing capability	1						1	2
Alignment of tools	1							1
Managing time		1	1	1				3
Balancing dual roles		1	1					2
Building relational trust		1	1			1		3
Release alignment and organisation			1	1			1	3
Commitment to shared vision				1				1
Change management					1			1
Colleague resentment					1			1
Transient students						1	1	2
Future sharing of resources						1		1
Diverse student needs							1	1
External bodies' priorities							1	1
Differentiating professional development							1	1
Developing a leadership profile							1	1

Participants described a variety of challenges in their CoL leadership role. These included aspects of building a collaborative culture, balancing priorities and time, staff turnover, capacity building, change management, and responding to varied student, teacher and school needs.

Three participants identified the alignment and organisation of release within and across schools to be a challenge. One participant described the increased workload of planning for relief teachers while also tracking assessment and delivering reporting requirements:

> "I've had it difficult. I don't have the whole full two days. I've had one full day and then I might have an afternoon here and an afternoon there. So I was trying to run a full English, full writing programme and full maths programme and then someone would come and take one day of that and at the end I was

writing all the reports and it was a big load... So I think that is the challenge in the model." (Participant Three)

Three participants identified managing time and balancing the dual role of a classroom teacher and CoL leader to be a challenge. One Across School Leader described the challenge of aligning their release to meet with Within School Leaders across different schools:

> "Time is always a challenge even though I get two days a week, and the way that each school structures their release for their Across School Leads is a bit different. Some are a bit more flexi-time with one fixed day and then flexi-days when they need it." (Participant Two)

Three participants identified building relational trust with schools and their Senior Leadership Teams to be a challenge. One participant recounted an instance where establishing relational trust with a Senior Leadership Team had been initially challenging:

> "Building relationships with the principals in particular, but also Senior Leadership Teams in the schools you're working with, initially was a really big challenge... It took a while for us to break through with that and it required a bit of work, but the end result was that, that principal now put a certain number of increases of this matrix in their Strategic Plan and was selling it to their Board. So we got there in the end. We did overcome that and that was really about building that relational trust." (Participant Two)

Three participants identified the organisation of communication channels across the CoL to be a challenge. One participant explained the challenges in communicating across a wider system:

> "Challenges have definitely been communication. Communication between the principals and the governance, and the communication through to our group of Across Schools leaders and then down to the Within School Leaders and organising those collaborative groups and actually finding time to get together and communicate." (Participant Four)

Two participants identified leadership turnover and the induction of new staff to be a challenge. One participant described the challenges of maintaining pace and developments when leaders need replacing:

> "One of the biggest challenges in our unique situation has been staff turnover and just getting maintenance and sustainability in schools. That's been a challenge." (Participant Seven)

Two participants identified student transience to be a challenge when monitoring and tracking achievement data. One of these participants described the challenges of increasing student achievement in a transient community:

> "Ok, so those kids there – half of them aren't actually in our community anymore because they've left the community, not because they've moved on because they're older, but because they've left. They tend to go and then also with all the housing going on in [place], we've had a massive influx of new families coming in." (Participant Seven)

Two participants identified maintaining patience and an appropriate pace when building leadership capacity. One of these participants described their usual desire to be a 'fix-it' person and progress work at pace. They reflected on the need to be patient when building the capacity of others:

> "So, I'm really conscious about trying to grow the others' capability rather than getting in there and doing it for them. So you'll see, for example, on our blog or digital spaces it's really hard for me to sit back and try to push people along where sometimes I feel it's just easier to just get in there and do it myself. I just get frustrated that it doesn't move fast enough. I also get frustrated that sometimes I also hear the same message just coming through and I'm thinking, 'Hang on a minute, haven't we already done this?' So did we not cover it well enough that we're doing it again?" (Participant One)

One Lead Principal discussed the challenges in building a leadership platform for CoL leaders to deliver development in their own schools:

"I've spoken to principals about it and said, "Look, we're really looking at building capacity with In-School Leaders. You have to give them a profile in your school - that's the whole point of it." (Participant Seven)

One participant identified the future national vision of sharing resources across CoL to be an anticipated challenge:

"The other thing is the future, in the way we're set up. There's been some talk now about our facilities and sharing things like that. So how we best do that and optimise what we're doing is a challenge... We could probably share resources and not just physical resources but I'm talking about teaching resources and things like that. The challenge is how do we do it? How do we do it well? And that will be good in the respect that the children can see what happens in the next school, and the next school as they progress through. So that relationship would be built. So that's one thing we're trying to work on at the moment." (Participant Six)

Question 7c: How are you successful in your CoL role?
Question 7d: Can you describe one example of a success?

Table 4.18: Leadership – successes

Successes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Developing leadership capacity	1	1	1		1	1		5
Building relationships				1			1	2
Engagement				1				1
Strategic planning					1			1
Developing leadership teams					1	1	1	3
Improvement in assessment data							1	1

Participants were asked to describe the successes of their CoL leadership role. Five participants discussed that building leadership capacity brought them the greatest feelings of success. These included participants increasing leaders' and teachers' technical competence, pedagogical knowledge and ability to work in a team.

One Lead Principal discussed the improvement across schools' capability assessment data to have brought the greatest success:

"...I think from my point of view the biggest success has been that shift in the school capability assessment. That was a tick. That's huge for our community that kids have more agency in their learning. It's about the kids. That was really positive that the three-year slog, 'cause it wasn't easy, it was slog at times. But actually, yeah, look at that progress. Individual schools have made it, look across the whole – because they do a whole CoL analysis for us as well and it's significant shifts. So that's been a really huge success." (Participant Seven)

One Across School Leader described the feeling of success when presenting the increases in capability data to school leadership teams:

*"*That was overwhelmingly positive, it was like you guys have done an amazing job, thank you so much. We should be publishing this. Thank you so much. So that was a success. That was a big success. This document, in particular, has generated quite a bit of interest from other schools. [Name of school] now wants to start using it and including it in some way, shape or form." (Participant Two)

Three participants identified experiencing success through developing leadership teams. One Lead Principal discussed the satisfaction in bringing experienced and new Across School Leaders together alongside the Strategic Plan:

"Bringing them together in terms of that Strategic Direction, and I think they're working really well as a team. There's a great rapport and a real willingness to investigate, find out, develop. So, I'd say the leadership of the ASL is going really well and the strategic planning has gone very well. Also, I have the support of my colleagues which is nice." (Participant Six)

Two participants identified success in building relationships. One Across School Leader described the success in making this a priority from the beginning:

"Building the relationships has been key and that was one of our focuses right at the beginning. Just getting to know the Within School Leaders, getting to know the SLTs. The SLT involvement I'm very proud of. I think it would have

happened anyway but I like to take personal…you know…I really have been championing that." (Participant Four)

Section Eight

Question 8: Is there anything else you would like to share about your role as a positional leader in your CoL?

Table 4.19: Additional participant responses

Additional responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	TOTAL
Pace of work	1		1	1	1	1		5
Digital presence	1							1
Career progression		1	1				1	3
Problem-solving		1						1
Value work, model, learning from others			1	1	1	1	1	5
Sharing nationally				1				1
Sustainability of model and funding				1	1			2
Collaboration in competitive environments					1			1
Importance of student voice					1			1
Importance of communicating structures for change					1			1
Workload						1		1

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if there was anything that they would like to share regarding their role as a positional leader in a CoL.

Five participants discussed the need to take a slow and considered approach to the work in order to embed and strengthen change. One Lead Principal summarised this as:

"Important to take the time to develop collaboration, meet schools and staff where they are at on their collaborative journey and understand the unique context of each school." (Participant Five)

Five participants valued the design of the CoL model. A Lead Principal discussed how the leadership model was working for their group of schools:

"I think within our CoL, principals are pretty much, "It's working for us; we're doing what we need to do." Not once has anyone said, "You're the boss, you

need to tell us what to do." It's not about that whatsoever. My role is to manage the Across School and Within School Leaders and that's what I do. So I think that's been a real positive." (Participant Seven)

Three participants discussed concerns about future career progressions for CoL leaders where the main work was in leading learning and enacting change. A Lead Principal described the opportunities for able practitioners as Within School Leaders who did not want to advance through a traditional leadership hierarchy:

"There are people that are In School Leaders that are being recognised for their expertise that are going, "I love this. I don't want to be a team leader but this is so different." It's fantastic. So, I think the alternative pathway for those people that want that but they don't want to be a DP. I think is fantastic." (Participant Seven)

An Across School Leader shared their questions for the future of Across School Leaders who wanted to remain focused on delivering learning through pedagogy rather than an administration dominated leadership role:

"Maybe only the 'Where to from here?' And what the vision is for this pathway. Does it end with an Across School Lead? What's next? How can I get into a role that's potentially non-teaching and still do this sort of stuff?" (Participant Seven)

One Across School Leader discussed their use of the Complex Problem-Solving model (Robinson et *al.*, 2015) to understand each schools' needs and then work to find specific and shared outcomes across the CoL:

"You've got teachers and In School leaders and principals and senior leaders and potentially Boards as well, with their own agenda, and you need to negotiate each of these elements to implement change. So the Solving Complex Problems has been something I've been working on and learning about; that you need to get all of these pieces to fit together and that can only happen when there are some constraints and actual boundaries within the role." (Participant Two)

One participant discussed concerns at the Lead Principal's workload and suggested a shared portfolio approach in the future:

> "I think it needs to embed, and I think it needs to strengthen, and I think there needs to be some model, and I said it before about sharing those roles a little bit. So instead of one allowance for the Lead person, maybe three allowances - as portfolios. That's one way I'd see it as being more sustainable." (Participant Six)

An Across School Leader discussed valuing learning from experts and peers in other CoL:

> "...and heard Anne Milne talk. It's very confronting, but really, really interesting as well. It's really set a challenge for me personally. It's been awesome, just that opportunity for professional learning has been great." (Participant Four)

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the major findings presented in Chapter Four drawing on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. These findings derive from the research questions presented in Chapter One:

1. What are the expectations of positional leaders with respect to their role in Communities of Learning?
2. How do positional leaders' practices compare to the National Criteria for Communities of Learning?
3. How do positional leaders perceive their challenges and successes within Communities of Learning?

Two underlying themes have emerged from the data collected. The themes describe participants' responses to the Community of Learning reform policy and design as they work in leadership roles across schools. These themes are: i) prescription in an autonomous model and ii) interpreting change.

Theme One: Prescription in an Autonomous Model

A key finding of this study was that the majority of participants perceived the process of forming the Achievement Challenge targets required by the Ministry of Education negatively. Six participants spoke specifically about their experiences during either the writing of targets (during the CoL Formation Stage) or attempting to deliver them during implementation. Participants discussed the targets across three of the interview questions. These were: What do you understand to be the Ministry of Education's expectation of your role? Have you been able to adapt the National Expectations to your CoL needs? What have been your challenges and successes? Participant data found the target setting process challenging, lacking relevance and conflicting with the methodology. Returning to the interview transcripts provides the opportunity for deeper analysis of the experiences which resulted in these feelings and reviewing the literature presented in Chapter Two provides the opportunity to understand if these are normal responses for educators leading school reform and to understand why they responded in the way they did.

Challenging Data Collection

The key consolidated findings in the beginning of this sub-section are presented through the lens of one participant as they navigated the challenges of writing their CoL Achievement Challenge targets.

The external requirements of forming Achievement Challenge targets required participants to have extensive data management experience. Although participants attempted to access internal capability across member schools, the skills were not available to collate, aggregate and analyse large and diverse data sets. The enormity of this challenge had led Participant Five's principals' group to conclude that: "This is too hard." These leaders' feelings of frustration and incompetence are reminiscent of the 1980s school reform era of 'uniformed prescription' (Barber, 2002). As in the 1980s, policymakers defined standards and goals for schools that did not yet have the resources to problem-solve or build internal capability themselves. Educators not possessing the required skills to respond to mandated policy continue to exist today (Fullan, 2015).

The political climate in New Zealand at the time of these leaders' work resulted in additional challenges for participants compiling targets. A change in government

resulted in the removal of mandatory reporting requirements for schools. This additional layer of complexity was explained by Participant Five, '...and then, of course, the thing that threw us completely was, National Standards went. So we just got completely and utterly lost.' Participant Five explained that understanding and aligning the different descriptors across their schools had felt like an impossible task. They recounted repeated attempts to make sense of the different approaches with the '...primary school principals explaining "Well I use this" and "I use that" and "I've got a seven-point scale" and "I've got a three-point" and somebody else has a ten-point…'. Fullan (2015) supports the importance of considering the frequently changing educational landscape that these leaders work in, where emerging elements require interpretation and response, 'All of this is further complicated because circumstances are constantly changing due to demographic, environmental, and other natural shifts, as well as deliberate policy attempts to improve the situation, which more often than not muddy the waters' (p. 4).

This advice was well forecast, as Participant Five's next experience resulted from continued changes to improve policy implementation. When Participant Five was finally able to present the completed data targets for submission to the Ministry of Education, they experienced several requests for amendments '...we had got this data in so many different formats and...every time the Ministry people would come back and say, "Oh there's a new format that [Secretary of Education] likes," and they'd look at each other across the table and (ask) "What's [Secretary of Education's] latest format? Can you tell me what the latest format is?" So, in the end, they said to us, "You just give us the data and we will make it into whatever it is needed to be made into, to actually get it across the line for you".

This participant's experiences and frustrations with changing expectations from policy makers align with the international findings of Wiseman and Akiba (2013) as they studied the challenges of implementing reforms designed for a 'static cultural system' (p. 22) rather than the complex and ever-changing global landscape. Their findings confirmed that the most successful reforms were first trialled through a continuous improvement model where stakeholder feedback was compiled and actioned from multiple pilot schemes over an extended period of time. This deliberate planning process allowed the time necessary to deliberate and make changes to policy that informed the reform's final design.

Within the New Zealand context, this lack of responsiveness was previously experienced in the 1990s following results of the Picot Taskforce. The only recommendation not taken forward from Picot into the major Tomorrow's Schools reform was the creation of an Education Policy Council. One of the three proposed roles of this council was to evaluate the impact of current practices and develop new policies. Background reading for a review of Tomorrow's Schools (Ministry of Education, 2017) concluded that a new improving achievement focus included the identification of weaknesses and priorities for improvement. However, it appears this suggestion has not been included at the time, or in the CoL reform.

Lacking Relevance

In the early stages of the CoL Implementation Phase, participants had developed a clear understanding of their communities' needs. All CoL represented in the study had prioritised the progression of pedagogical drivers as a vehicle to develop teacher capability, rather than directly focusing on the targeted outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics. The literature defends this position in support of modern school reform; the narrow development of curriculum content knowledge does not support schools to act as learning organisations that problem-solve and increase overall capacity. Research confirms that focusing solely on curriculum content, results in non-transferable skills (Elmore, 2002). Teachers receiving specific content and skills for delivery are unaware of why they are doing them and are unable to adapt their practices across contexts. This approach to increasing capacity works against the CoL methodology - informed prescription does not lead to transformational change (Fullan, 2003).

This study's findings might also suggest that this study's participants, in particular, would be less accepting of the prescription delivered through the Achievement Challenge targets, as their CoL were becoming increasingly self-sufficient. Participants described the prescribed targets as narrowly focused and not related to their most important needs. They perceived the formation of targets as a compliance requirement for external use and a 'hoop to jump through' that would allow them to then focus on what mattered most. Participant Five summarised: '...when we got ticked off we said, "OK, park that and get on with the stuff that really matters to us." ' Barber (2007) explains that system users of school reform will be most accepting of the command

and control of prescriptive interventions as a solution to improve extreme underperformance. The participants included in this study did not appear to fit this category; they discussed careful systems of self-review and evidenced improvement strategies. The Ministry of Education's prescriptive structures were not perceived to be of benefit to these leaders.

The study found that the prescribed MoE targets reinforced the importance by the New Zealand government of student achievement over evidenced continuous improvement. This study's participants were at the implementation stage of development and had now prioritised pedagogical drivers to increase teacher and leadership capacity over direct work in target areas. However, this led to them feeling conflicted in their role delivering government policy. Participant Seven explained: 'That was one of the tensions I felt. I had Ministry here going, "You've got to do this, you've got to do that." And I had the principals here going, "But we want to do this, we want to do this!" ' This phenomenon is not unusual when embarking on new school reform, where a carry-over of previous compliance-based approaches is applied to secure outcomes. Peterson, Finn and Kanstroroom (2011) explain the potentially restricting nature of this, evidenced in America's NCLB (No Child Left Behind) reform strategy. Their study concluded that the priority to meet and deliver systems became the focal point and instances exemplifying greater capacity were ignored. States that were in a position to go further than legal requirements felt constrained, 'the most convincing criticism of NCLB has come not from accountability sceptics but from states like Florida that were in a position to go beyond what the law requires but were forced to simplify their approach to comply with the law's mandates' (p. 63). This same constraint was described by participants earlier in this theme as they had identified the enablers that were of far greater importance than the targets.

Conflicting Methodology

Participants sensed a mismatch between the intended autonomous reform methodology and the prescriptive targets. While an increasing body of research in New Zealand and internationally supports localised decision-making and accountability as an effective change model (Department for Education, 2010; Finn, 1991; Jensen and Clark, 2013), participants' initial work in the forming of Achievement Challenge targets conflicted with their priorities; it represented the work of Ministry rather than the collective needs of their CoL. Participant Two speculated whether the Ministry had

intended to control the direction of schools or whether it was an error in judgment: 'I think the reins were very tight to start with because the Ministry needed to make sure that everyone was, there's quite a lot of money involved really... maybe it was strategic that it was very tight to start with and then the loosening off of those constraints as the progress happened. Maybe. Or maybe it's an organic process that they've realised, "Oh no, we were way too tight to start with, we need to start thinking about these other important elements."' Another participant described the conflict of their dual role, delivering the National Expectations while honouring their member schools' differing priorities, 'We still need to be accountable for this - we're getting this money; we're getting these roles.' (Participant Seven)

It is interesting to note that participants' clear understanding of the intended CoL reform led them to make changes against elements of the policy that contradicted the philosophy of the approach. Their changes away from policy, actually led to them being more responsive to the reform rather than removed from it. Similar conclusions were reached by Spillane, Parise and Sherer (2011), who presented a contrasting view to that of organisational routines as an inhibitor of change; concluding instead, that leaders redesigned their organisation's routines as they 'coupled' government regulations with technical core work. This had resulted in leaders embedding practices that led to standardising instructional programmes, maintaining vision, monitoring progress and bringing transparency to classroom instruction.

Theme Two: Interpreting Change

The second key finding of this study was that participants solidified their understanding of intended policy change through the leadership experiences they created for themselves and others.

This section begins by outlining participants' alignment with CoL reform as a precondition for interpreting policy interpretation, before expanding on how participants' made sense of the new reform through active engagement and transparent leadership.

Alignment with Reform Influences Instructional Leadership

One of the findings from the interviews revealed a link between participants' positive perceptions of their work as leaders and the instructional leadership actions they used to deliver change. Five participants supported the CoL model in its entirety. The reasons for alignment can be found in their reflections on pedagogical approaches, leadership methods and focus on improved student outcomes. This observation is similar to that reported in the literature, which asserts that leaders' positive alignment with new policy is an important precursor to successful implementation (Seashore Louis and Robinson, 2012). For example, Participant Two discussed their use of the model to develop their own philosophy: '… part of that is defining my own ideals of education leadership and what I think leadership in an education setting should look like.' Interestingly, two participants did not support the change model; however, their stance did not result in dissimilar instructional leadership practices from those who held positive views. This was shown by Participant Seven who held conflicting priorities to the Ministry of Education but described their commitment to develop collaborative capability across member schools, 'to ensure that there is some consistency, some efficiency, a shared belief system and collective teacher efficacy…' In returning to the interview data, it is evident these leaders' misalignment relates to specific elements of implementation, design and funding. For example, Participant Six described their concerns towards the sustainability of the model, 'No, I don't think it was a good model at all. I think it's been quite wasteful.'

In understanding why leaders with differing alignment deliver similarly positive instructional practices, it seems probable that leaders' alignment with the underlying philosophy of the change policy is the most important factor. Leaders who believe in the ideology of the model are able to navigate tensions and disconnects without affecting their current or emerging practices.

Given these participants' misalignment with aspects of policy, it was unusual that they did not display the limiting responses usually associated with threat rigidity to education reform (Osen and Sexton, 2009). Participants did not display maladaptive attitudes that impacted on the organisational climate. Instead, their belief and commitment to the intended reform allowed them to mediate policy aspects without them becoming overbearing or limiting their desire to effect change.

Making Sense of Policy

One of the findings from the interviews revealed that leaders interpreted the new CoL reform policy through an individual lens. Leaders used their 'entry level' strengths as a platform to engage with a theoretical aspect of the change policy which then informed their leadership. For example, Participant Three used their previously successful application of a collaborative approach to make sense of the work they were leading, '...so (I'm) doing this on a bigger scale. I've done quite a bit of reading on collaboration and collaborative teaching and I think the more we come out of little silos and the more we interact, we build on each other's expertise.' This observation is similar to Participant One who appeared to be negotiating the rhetoric of the change methodology alongside their own outcomes. They described their understanding of building relational trust: '...you must have that connection stage. Everyone moving around and rubbing each other's back,' alongside their passion, above everything else, for leaders to be visible online: 'If I can't find you when I search for you, what are you doing in the role?'

A key reason these leaders were displaying adaptive methodologies was due to the knowledge, skills and previous successes they held in specific, yet different, areas. The literature supports the theory that leaders are most likely to interpret abstract policy, such as the concept of collaboration, based on their previous individual experiences and existing schema: 'What is in them depends on what is in us, and vice-versa' (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978, p. 113). Kirwan (2013) asserts the importance of this cognitive approach to leaders' organisational learning, where individuals' memory processes are at the heart of how they learn. As leaders' roles increase in complexity, they become less tangible or easy to define in behavioural terms and the leader is relied on to progress themselves, 'At higher levels, people are usually acquiring more declarative (contextual) knowledge, and integrating it with what they already know, building up their expertise in particular areas and making it easier to use that knowledge to solve future problems' (p. 8).

Initiating Change Without Direction

One of the findings from the interviews revealed that participants initiated their own sense-making processes of the prescribed policy changes. The reason being, that there was little guidance on how to deliver change across schools. Several participants discussed an extended period of time where they explored the new and unknown CoL

reform environment. Participant Three concluded, 'So, we had about a year of really just feeling our way in the dark.' This observation is similar to that described in the literature. For example Seashore Louis & Robinson (2012) note that, until recently there has been little understanding of the phenomenology of change, describing this as a 'silence' in understanding how instructional leaders deliver change and achieve targets across schools and communities.

The literature explains that previous reforms have neglected to address how leaders actually experience change as different from how it might be intended, which has resulted in the failure of most school reforms (Fullan, 2015). This finding is also reflected in my data which observed participants 'acting out' their interpretation of the desired change against the evidence supporting the reform policy. For example, Participant Four explained their use of the reform methodology to solve a leadership challenge, 'We actually went from student needs first... where you saw the greatest need within your group of students and that's where we started from. Then we were able to formulate this goal that did transfer across these different contexts. It's been very powerful.' In this instance, Participant Four had originally felt the diverse contexts of the teachers in their collaborative inquiry group would be an inhibitor. However, they understood that the identification of student needs was an underlying methodology in CoL reform and applied this to the leadership context.

This study highlighted participants' exploration of literature to solve leadership challenges. For example, Participant Two had identified the work of Robinson, Meyer, Le Fevre and Sinnema (2015) to solve challenges across member schools. Participant Two explained: '...you need to negotiate each of these elements to implement change…. that you need to get all of these pieces to fit together and that can only happen when there are some constraints and actual boundaries within the role.' In this instance, Participant Two works to apply their knowledge of uncovering and resolving dilemmas, as a process to solve their self-identified systemic problems.

Participants' obvious resolve to lead this school reform, without clarity about their work, led me to consider what drove them to seek and apply new educational approaches without explicit direction. In returning to the interview data, two reasons emerged. The key reason for participants' initiation of leadership actions in the absence of direction appears to be their intrinsic drive to develop their own leadership as they solved CoL

problems. For example, Participant Three discussed the value of working with another leader in '... co-constructing and learning about what to do as we went.' The study also revealed secondary drivers, where participants' alignment to the reform model propelled them to advocate its success. Participants' responses highlighted their desire to validify the model's design. For example, Participant Four explicitly endorsed the work of CoL: 'So we have been very, very outspoken about, "This is what we've done, we've been collaborating here, we've seen improvements here and we have data to prove it..." Participants also discussed the need to affirm the remuneration for their roles to colleagues. For example, Participant Three explained, 'We felt huge pressure that we were being paid this money and we needed to do something, we needed something to show for it...'

Reorganise Schemas

The study revealed that participants were attempting to change their leadership behaviours by measuring metacognitive understandings against the reform's methodologies. For example, Participant One had come to understand that their desire to accelerate learning meant they wanted to complete work for their colleagues; however, they understood that this would not result in growing others' capacity: 'So, I'm really conscious about trying to grow the others' capability rather than getting in there and doing it for them.' A strong body of research links leaders' existing schema with their ability to affect change (Majone & Wildavsky, 1978; Fullan 2015; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002).

Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) studied leaders as implementing agents of policy. Their work formulated a cognitive framework that brought transparency to the policy implementation process to analyse success or failure. They concluded that high-level school reforms require leaders to reorganise their existing schemas as they make sense of policy. As leaders engage with policymakers' intentions, successful indicators included changing behaviours that evolved over time: 'A key dimension of the implementation process is whether, and in what ways, implementing agents come to understand their practice, potentially changing their beliefs and attitudes in the process' (p. 387). This was shown by Participant Two who discussed their desire to deliver leadership acts that genuinely engaged colleagues in learning, 'When you don't have that positional authority you cannot lead by saying, "You've got to do this!" "Why? Why do I have to do that? You can't make me do that." And that's part of learning about our

role I think; it's trying to learn that difference in situational leadership and generating a followership rather than dictating what you need.'

These findings have similarities to the work of Ozga (2012) who supports the importance of educators owning the theorising process rather than handing it over to researchers. Ozga further explains that theories are statements about how things connect and develop; they may look quite differently on paper to the lived reality of on-the-ground education. Theories may also be limited in their scope, from the range of resources that leaders encounter; having different weighting, complexities and quality across different organisations. It is through leaders' routine theorising and responsive enacting of policy as a 'guide to action' (p. 174), that government policy can strengthened.

Horizontal and Vertical Nature - Immediate Personal Change

A final finding from the interviews revealed that participants gained even further understanding of the change model, and confidence in delivering their role, by repositioning themselves across their system. Leaders' reorganisation of their existing personal schemas and ability to deliver their work increased as they worked horizontally and vertically with colleagues across their system. For example, a Participant Six had engaged in new ways of thinking which had resulted in them acting differently, "So, it's changed my outlook of leadership as not just being a top-down thing (which I know we try not to do, but it ends up that way sometimes), and looking at how you can lead across." This observation is similar to that reported in the literature. For example, Spillane, Reiser and Reimer (2002) explain that leaders' personal change needs to be fully understood within leader's systemic context of the reform, 'The bottom-up perspective is also central, in that implementing agents' scripts or schemata, coupled with their situations, are fundamental constituting elements in the sense-making process' (p. 420). The responsive nature of the CoL model across schools appears to facilitate leaders directly applying their new learning in this way. For example, Participant Four discussed a sense of pace to their work as '...us learning first and then communicating to them.'

It is appropriate to consider these findings alongside a study by Cardno, Robson, Deo, Bassett and Howse (2019) which analysed the strength of agreement between New Zealand middle leaders' confidence levels and their instructional role expectations.

Their conclusions found aligning high role expectations and confidence levels in leaders demonstrating pedagogical leadership. This has been a repeated finding within this study, where participants displayed a tendency to promote pedagogical goals ahead of perceived policy direction.

Of additional interest were the statistically significant differences between role expectation and performance confidence in the dimensions of: Identifying appropriate professional learning and development, and Participation in own learning and development. When making comparisons between the two studies, there is agreement in regard to the identification of professional learning and development. This study's participants discussed their need to apply various strategies to identify member schools' needs, before negotiating with school leaders and adapting original plans to form delivery models. However, when considering the variation in professional learning and development, the participants in this study spoke confidently about their approach to their own learning and engaging in problem-solving to respond to member schools. Equivalent measures were not used in my study, and therefore exact statements cannot be measured. However, my sense is, that while participants were engaging in challenging personal learning, their positive achievements resulted in feelings of success rather than the perception of negative or overwhelming challenges.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In Chapter Five findings were discussed with support from the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and in relation to the aims of this research. This final chapter will provide an overview of the research study. The chapter will draw overall conclusions, draw implications, evaluate the limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research.

An Overview of the Research Study

The overall aims of this research study were to investigate the work of positional leaders in New Zealand CoL during the implementation phase of development. Specifically, it explored how the CoL government reform model is interpreted and organised across schools and the challenges positional leaders experience. Five key conclusions are presented which relate to the three research questions that guided this study. The first three conclusions relate to the prescriptive element of setting CoL Achievement Challenge targets. The following two conclusions relate to how leaders self-direct their learning and understand policy through their leadership actions.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: Autonomy and Prescription

The research concluded that the CoL reform had two levers of change working against each other - prescription and autonomy. Whilst the prescriptive target-setting approach progressed the government's long-standing agenda to directly increase student outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics, it was embedded in a reform model premised on the mobilisation of highly capable leaders tasked with effecting innovative and sustainable change in direct response to their community's ongoing needs.

The narrow parameters of the Achievement Challenge targets at the time of this study caused initial tensions for participants as they worked to compile schools' data into the required format. The targets continued to cause tensions for leaders during the implementation stage as they discovered their member schools' pedagogical priorities outweighed foci on curriculum targets.

It was acknowledged by participants that the Secretary of Education now accepted a wider degree of Achievement Challenge targets specific to each CoL. However, the initial restrictions had resulted in implications that impacted on leaders' feelings towards policy, the development of their CoL and their ability to progress their work:

> Leaders were resentful of the time taken to complete the process.
> Leaders' initial work was spent on compliance processes rather than community engagement.
> Leaders felt incompetent when faced with challenges.
> Leaders' sense-making of the new reform was slowed by conflicting agendas.
> Leaders felt compromised in their obligations to the Ministry and their community.
> Leaders were hesitant to update their Achievement Challenge to reflect their current focus areas.

Conclusion 2: Continuous Improvement Model

A second, yet related conclusion is the absence of a continuous improvement philosophy in the CoL design. Had there been mechanisms provided for leaders to communicate ideas, misalignment and tensions with policymakers in the early adoption

of the CoL model, the implications listed in Conclusion One may have been avoided. This recommendation is not new to New Zealand school reform, being made by the Picot Taskforce in 1989. It was not actioned then, nor in the Communities of Learning design delivered in 2014.

The study concluded that New Zealand policymakers made considered and informed decisions based on evidence and international outcomes when considering the CoL. These aspects were positively acknowledged and valued by participants. However, it did not include explicit reciprocal communication processes that could improve policy in an ongoing manner.

Conclusion 3: Strength of Voice in Intermediary Agents

The third related conclusion from this study confirmed the important role of District Administrators in partnering with CoL to interpret and deliver reform policy and support implementation. The data indicated that New Zealand's Education Advisors and CoL leaders were working in their new roles, in partnership, to meet the unique needs of each cluster of schools.

Participant data clearly indicated that Education Advisors working so closely with schools in these roles, accumulated valuable policy implementation information regarding the challenges experienced by leaders. However, there was a sense that Education Advisors were not able to relay these to policymakers. These accumulated findings suggest that those acting in intermediary roles require greater authority in conveying implementation outcomes to policymakers for considered policy changes.

Conclusion 4: Reform Alignment Increased Instructional Practices

The study concluded that as participants interpreted the CoL reform model, they self-initiated changes to their instructional leadership practices. The key determinant of change was participants' positive alignment to the underlying reform ideology. Leaders took personal responsibility for interpreting the new CoL reform policy and engaged with research that supported the change methodology.

Conclusion 5: Enacting Leadership Changes

The study concluded that leaders designed and engaged in leadership actions which allowed them to affirm their knowledge of the intended reform and to practise applying leadership theories.

Leaders engaged in personal and system-wide changes simultaneously. Participants' responsive approach to their communities resulted in leaders accessing skills and information to meet the needs of their communities in a 'just in time' manner.

Personal changes to instructional leadership were made as participants applied the reform methodology to a personal area of skill. This supported leaders to perform and critique new ideals against their own values and leadership actions. The leadership activities that participants' planned and delivered for colleagues allowed them to further interpret the reform within their CoL context.

Participants' interpretation of the reform was further strengthened as they performed leadership acts horizontally and vertically across their system. The participants in this study described a problem-solving approach to system-wide challenges and an intrinsic drive to change their leadership practices.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

A recommendation resulting from this study is that policymakers of school reform include design elements that allow the policy to be adapted and improved in response to feedback and implementation outcomes. New processes that invite reciprocal communication between stakeholders and policymakers would lead to a continuous improvement model; these would provide important general implementation information while understanding different contexts. In New Zealand, this adaption would provide further alignment to the largely, autonomous CoL design.

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation of this study is to further support school leaders to understand what is known about change leadership processes.

Conclusions Four and Five indicate that participants' successful delivery of their work was more dependent on their personal dispositions rather than a deeper understanding of the change processes required across collaborative school communities. This would be expected, given the limited research in this area.

Although Participant Three explained that they were finding their way in the dark for a significant amount of time, this did not prevent them from exploring modern literature, trialling instructional practices and prioritising others' needs over their own skill level - trying out their new learning alongside others in the vertical and horizontal nature of CoL. In short, participant leaders displayed brave leadership attributes.

I am reminded of Participant Six describing the wastefulness of some CoL design aspects, such as the time it took to 'get underway' in the development and early implementation stages of CoL. Although participants described accessing leadership support from external personnel such as Expert Partners, Change Managers, The Springboard Trust, and Professional Development companies, it is appropriate to recommend that the Ministry of Education and CoL consider how positional leaders can be further supported to understand the existing and emerging research related to change leadership in and across collaborative school communities.

Area for Future Study

One of this study's questions included understanding how positional leaders' practices compared to the National Criteria for Communities of Learning. In synthesising the conclusions above, it has raised the question of how leaders engaged with their Theory of Improvement - another requirement of the Achievement Challenge submitted for endorsement to the Secretary of Education. Why did CoL feel they could not prioritise the pedagogical enablers previously identified in their Theory of Improvement? This is an important consideration, as all CoL in this study described their journey during the implementation phase that led to the delivery of pedagogical enablers. Therefore, a resulting area of future study could explore how different elements of policy are interpreted and applied.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to a small number of Lead Principals and Across School Leaders across four urban New Zealand CoL. The research does not offer any perspectives from rural CoL in New Zealand schooling.

A further limitation of the study is that it did not include the views of Within School Leaders, the third new tier of positional leaders in the CoL structure. Although the study planned for their inclusion, no participants took up the invitation to be part of the study. It is possible that the nature of the CoL approached in the implementation phase of development, at this time of the reform, were predominantly focused on the development of Across School Leaders as implementors of change.

Final Conclusion

This study adds to the limited body of research related to the new Community of Learning reform in New Zealand. The ultimate aim of the study was to investigate the work of positional leaders in CoL.

Participants described the required Achievement Challenge targets as a significant limiting factor to their leadership. However, they acknowledged and appreciated the recent change to accept broader targets by the Secretary of Education.

The study concluded that New Zealand policymakers had taken a measured approach to the CoL design after considering international implementation outcomes. The resulting, largely autonomous model, was valued by participant leaders who were actively involved in developing personal instructional leadership practices in response to their unique member schools' needs.

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Appendix A: Information for Participants

![Unitec Institute of Technology logo - TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIRAKA]

Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: The role of positional leaders in Communities of Learning

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project should I choose not to participate and may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the research project.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and their supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 10 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed. I understand that I will be provided with a transcript of the interview for verification and that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to two weeks after the return/confirmation of my verified transcript.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: ……………………………………………………………………..

Participant Signature: ………………………… Date: ……………………………

Project Researcher: ……………………………… Date: ……………………………

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2018-1038
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 15/8/2018 to 15/8/2019. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview Schedule

Study: The role of positional leaders in Communities of Learning.

Participants:
    Lead Principals
    Across School Leaders

(Introduction by Dawn)

Questions to Participants

Establishing information regarding the participant's role in their Community of Learning
    What is your role in your Community of Learning?
    How long have you been in this role?
    How many schools does your CoL include?
    Is your CoL unique in any way?

    What type of school do you work in?
    What is the student roll size of your school?
    What role do you have in your school?
    What involvement do other leaders and teachers in your school have in the Kāhui Ako?

Investigating participant alignment with external mandates
    What do you understand to be the Ministry of Education's expectation of you in your CoL role?
    Do your personal values and preferences align with the National direction of CoL? Please explain.
    Do the systemic tiers of your CoL (Combined Boards, Schools, Leaders, Teachers) have similar expectations of you and the work you do?
    Have you been able to adapt the National expectations to your own CoL context and needs?

Investigating the participant's expectation of their role
    What were your expectations of your Community of Learning role?
    Are/were other people's expectations of your role different to your own?

Investigating the work of the participants within their Community of Learning
    Describe the Kāhui Ako work/projects have you been involved in?
    Has your work or the role you have with others changed as a biproduct of your leadership in the Kāhui Ako? i.e. Are you involved with different projects or have different responsibilities (not directly allocated by CoL)? Are your interactions with others different due to your role? Have others' behaviours towards you changed?

Investigating how knowledge transfer and leading learning with peers is being approached in the Community of Learning.

How would you define the learners you work with in your 'community'?

How is knowledge transfer and learning organised across horizonal groups and organisational boundaries?

Investigating Teachers as Leaders in the Community of Learning.

What learning are you leading across your CoL?

How do situate and organise learning? E.g. Hierarchical tiers, designated target areas, interest groups, social networks, online etc.

Which types of learning are resulting in the most success? What are the indicators of this?

Investigating the challenges and successes of the participant's role in the Community of Learning

What are the challenges in your Kāhui Ako role?

Can you describe one example of this type of challenge?

How are you successful in your Kāhui Ako role?

Can you describe one example of a success?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your role as a positional leader in your Community of Learning?

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: The role of positional leaders in Communities of Learning

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don't have to be part of this research project should I choose not to participate and may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of the research project.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and their supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a computer at Unitec for a period of 10 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed. I understand that I will be provided with a transcript of the interview for verification and that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to two weeks after the return/confirmation of my verified transcript.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: ....

Participant Signature: .... *Date:* ....

Project Researcher: .... *Date:* ....

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2018-1038
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 15/8/2018 to 15/8/2019. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix D: Organisational Consent Form

To:
Dawn Fenn
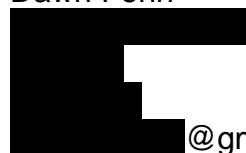
@gmail.com

Dear Dawn,

Re: Organisational Consent

I *(name) (position in organisation)* of *(organisation)* give consent for Dawn Fenn to undertake research in this organisation as discussed with the researcher.

This consent is granted subject to the approval of research ethics application 2018-1038 by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee and a copy of the application approval letter being forwarded to the organisation as soon as possible.

Signature:

Date: