

**A Principal's Student Leadership: Secondary Students'
Perceptions of the Qualities and Behaviours of their School
Principal**

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Abstract

The study is an exploratory and illuminative case study of a principal's leadership of a cross section of his students. It is situated within an 11-18, comprehensive school in a semi-rural, coastal town in the southwest of England. This predominantly white British school, with above national average levels of economic and social deprivation, has a recent historical context of rapid and sustained improvement in examination results at all levels over the period just before and during the study: two Ofsted inspections during this time judged the school to be good with outstanding features, following a previous judgement of 'satisfactory' just before the arrival of the principal.

The study offers an insider perspective in the field of principal effectiveness, which is more usually dominated by research from the outside, as the principal in question is also the researcher. Equally unusually in this field, the study explores the principal's leadership from a student's perspective by operating at the level of student voice and collecting their personal stories and opinions using six student focus groups. The groups were constructed and facilitated by a co researcher with the purpose of protecting students' identity, aiding reliability and adding a collaborative level of interpretation.

A social constructionist approach is adopted for the study which is situated in an interpretivist methodological paradigm. The data were analysed thematically and viewed from a socio cultural perspective. The research suggests that students are able to describe and recognise the concept of the principal's student leadership. Some, more than others, place a value on this in terms of it having an instrumental effect on their school experience and many view it from a relational perspective. These data support the findings of another piece of research from a similar perspective that suggests students value personal affirmative and affiliative qualities and traits in the leadership they experience from the headteacher (Moos et al 1998). From the socio cultural perspective of this study and the definition of social capital as being "relationships matter" (Putnam 2000) then it may be suggested that a principal's student leadership is likely to contribute, either positively or negatively, to students' social capital.

Although it is not possible to suggest generalisability from these findings, due to the very limited scope of the case study and small number of participant students, practitioners may nevertheless find the study of some value. This detailed and illuminative interrogation of the principal /researcher's specific context, may provide reflective colleagues with examples of good practice, that can be applied to their own context, when seeking ways to ensure that all students feel valued and empowered.

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Definitions and Abbreviations

Principal	The term principal is used rather than headteacher, which is more frequent in English secondary schools. In this South Western County, leaders of Community Colleges are deemed to be principals, whereas leaders of schools are called headteachers. However, as will be seen from the participant data, students use both terms
Student names	In order to ensure anonymity, students are given names beginning with a letter or number which is descriptive of the group they are in. Known students' names begin with K for instance, and Yr 7 students have a number beginning with 7.
Staff names	Staff are designated by different colours
LPSH	Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
TRACS	An onsite referral and intervention provision

The Fortress of Solitude

“Nothing reduces a headteacher’s authority more than being seen with children. If they are rude to your face in front of staff then the staff may realise you are not in control of the school. The solution to this problem is to create your own Fortress of Solitude, otherwise known as your office. If it is safely placed away from classrooms and you never leave it, except to go on Local Authority junkets, then you may never have to deal with a student directly at all. It can be embarrassing if you are showing somebody around the school and some of the students say ‘who the hell are you?’ but it beats being called names by the little scrotes” (Old 2005).

Chapter 1

Introduction

A principal's student leadership: secondary students' perceptions of the qualities and behaviours of their school principal

*To understand how things work is to gain control over them
(Terry Loughlin)*

1.1. Research Questions

This research investigation focuses on one aspect of my leadership as the principal of a large, comprehensive, community college in the Southwest of England. It examines the area of leadership of students (student leadership) and seeks to conceptualise and explore this by seeking students' perceptions of it. It is an attempt to understand the nature of this leadership and explore its place in educational leadership effectiveness from a behavioural perspective. These aims are explicit in the main description of the research topic above and three subsidiary research questions:

- How do students conceptualise student leadership?
- What do students perceive to be the characteristics of student leadership?
- What are students' perceptions of the qualities of the relationship between the principal and students?

1.2. Research Field

The investigation sits within the research field of principal effectiveness: this is already large and well researched. The quest to demonstrate, or not, that principals and headteachers have an effect on students' achievement that justifies their position and salary engages public as well as professional interest. Thankfully for this serving principal, it is now reasonable to report that there is a strong consensus amongst researchers, that good schools have good leaders (Sammons et al 1995, Robinson et al 2009, Day et al 2010) and that their behaviours and approaches are consequential in all kinds of ways to a variety of student outcomes. What has been termed as the "existing scholarly debate on

the possible impact of the principal's leadership on student outcomes" (Witziers et al 2003: 399) has sought to discover not only 'do they make a difference?' but also, 'what do they make a difference to?' The question at the heart of this investigation, however, is 'what is it they do that makes a difference?'

1.3. Researcher's Leadership Assumptions

As a practising principal these are questions that are of relevance to me on a daily basis. Implicitly, they are behind every decision, conversation and event that occurs in my professional existence. My direction as a principal of two secondary comprehensive schools, both of which were in categories of Cause for Concern at the time of my appointment has always been focused strongly on school improvement. Consequently, I have been especially reflective of my own practice and sought every opportunity to develop a deeper understanding and development of my own principal leadership ability. These have included NPQH and LPSH qualifications, a Master's Degree, and a wide range of leadership development opportunities, which have enabled me to appreciate and implement a range of approaches that in the literature might be described as *transformational* (Leithwood and Jantzi 1999, Engels et al 2008, Dempster 2009 and Leithwood and Sun 2009), and *moral* (Sergiovannii 1992); as having an *instructional* focus (Hallinger 2005) and that are carried out through a *distributed* structure (Harris 2003, Harris 2008, Dempster 2009)

However, these approaches, and there are others that I have understood and utilised in my own practice, are based on a theoretical premise that the effect of a principal's leadership on most student outcomes is indirect or mediated. In other words, principals have an effect on students by affecting teachers or what teachers do. This may be different for a teaching headteacher in the primary phase but would seem to make common sense in the case of a non-teaching secondary principal. The theoretical explanation for this would be that between the action or behaviour of a principal and the effect of that on a child there exists what Robinson describes as the "long causal chain" (Robinson et al 2009:37). This is a complex and interlocking chain of mediating factors or variables, many of which are reciprocal in their effect, and from which it would

be extremely difficult to separate out and identify the direct effect of the principal's actions.

This theoretical understanding is fully accepted by me as a principal. I operate under the assumption that any improvements in academic gain come directly from having better teachers who enable students to learn better and achieve improved progress and attainment outcomes. I understand that the focus of my work as a principal is to ensure this happens. Consequently, many of my actions are associated with teacher development, curriculum development, curriculum provision and consciously taking opportunities to ensure optimum improved conditions and resources for teachers; a key factor in teacher motivation and performance according to research (Blasé 1987, Leithwood and Sun 2009).

However, for me this only feels like part of the role. Mediated leadership, leading teachers so that *they* can have an effect on students does not feel like the essence of what I do. For me, there has always been a strong element of direct, face to face leadership of students, which seems to be of a similar nature and to be little different from my leadership of teachers. It is in this area, that between behaviours that are designed to work indirectly through teachers and those that may have a more direct effect on a student's school experience, that my investigation into student leadership hopes to contribute, in the on-going debate about what makes some principals more effective than others. This description from my field notes may act as a heuristic to provide the reader with a window into my understanding of the phenomenon. It was written after a conversation with a male, Year 11 student in the corridor when I could feel the essence of my leadership, my felt reality of my day to day school leadership, my leadership of students, occurring:

"Loosely described, my leadership of students feels like being the team captain of a large sports team; in this role I feel concerned, worried, doting, exhorting, responsible, modelling, motivating. It is a team of students, not adults, although there is a team of adults I lead as well and I am aware that I am showing the team of adults how to lead a team of students. In the main I

identify with the student team more than the adult team. The sports team metaphor could be replaced with a military one such as a captain leading his men over the top, but not one of captain of a ship, or of industry, which doesn't seem to capture the personal nature of the relationship between leader and lead. There is a suggestion of the heroic and charismatic, but it is not essentially that" (field notes Jan 14 2010).

The essence of student leadership may be the remains of what has been described as the "teacher part" of my professional identity (Macbeath 1998: 52); it may also be reminiscent of Weber's 'traditional' patriarchal definition of leadership derived from his tripartite definition of authority (Whimster 2004), but once acknowledged, even if not fully defined, the concept poses many questions. For example, can the students detect it? Do they have a sense of it? Is their sense of it the same as mine? Where do they see it? How would they describe it? Is it captured in the interactions between principal and students? Do they have an expectation of it? Do they have a model of it? Is it part of their conceptual understanding of 'principal' or '*principalness*'? Where has this image, this model, come from? Does it motivate students? Do they even notice it? Do other students take notice of it when they see it happening to others? Does principal student leadership provide a model for teacher student leadership? Is time spent on leadership of students a useful and effective means of influencing student outcomes?

1.4. Gaps in the Research Field

1.4.1. Principals' Student Leadership

Answers to these questions are hard to find even in the large literature of principal effectiveness. There seems to be no research which identifies the concept described above, the phenomenon of student leadership, and none that considers it as being a variable factor of a principal's effectiveness on any student outcome. It may be one of those factors described in the literature as having a direct effect but which research struggles to locate. For instance, Barker (2001: 75) mentions the "motivating effect" of school leaders on students in discussion about school climate; inferentially this may be presumed to be connected to student leadership but even here the mention is in passing, and

described alongside the effect on staff as indirect. Day et al (2008) too, mention the important indirect effects of leadership on pupil outcomes “in addition to those *direct* influences which headteachers exercise” (Day et al 2008:83) (my italics) and Robinson et al (2009) in describing the distinction between two categories of leadership effects defines one as “direct, as when leaders interact with others, or indirect, as when they change the conditions in which people work” (Robinson et al 2009:36). It seems that since Hallinger and Heck’s (1996) seminal review of existing research found that “the effects of principal leadership will occur indirectly through the principal’s efforts to influence those who come into more frequent direct contact with students” (*ibid*:24) that the search for more direct links between leader and outcomes has lessened. However, the search for these direct variables should not be marginalised: leading researchers suggest that “a significant challenge for leadership research is to identify those alterable conditions likely to have direct effects on students” (Leithwood and Jantzi 1999:455).

1.4.2. The Student Voice

In the general field of principal effectiveness research there has been very little ideographic investigation from an insider position in either secondary or primary phase, and none that has sought perceptual evidence from children, of the principal’s student leadership. However, one of the few studies that utilises student data, in particular their view of what makes good or bad headteachers, has provided a distinct stimulus to my investigation. The international project, *Effective Schools Leadership in a time of change* (Moos et al: 1998) found that for UK secondary students in particular, it is the personal qualities of the principal, especially relational qualities such as the ability to listen, communicate, empathise, and show a sense humour that are valued most by students. These findings gathered “from insiders of the system” seemed worthy of further investigation. The largest clustering of these personal ‘competencies’ are those categorised as “establishing positive relationships” (Macbeath and Myers 1999: 9) and it is this phenomenon, the relationship between principal and students, and the quality and nature of it, that may

characterise the essence of the concept of 'principal student leadership' being investigated in this study.

The idea being explored in this investigation, the idea that behaviours characterised as student leadership, those that may be mainly relational behaviours and which may have an effect on students' school experience, seems particularly relevant at this time of rapid change in the context of the role of school leaders. An increased necessity to focus on *managerial/technical* aspects of the role, to the detriment of time spent on instructional behaviours and being present in school, have been a noticeable feature of principals' practice in recent years (Ofsted 2003). This tendency to spend more time away from schools has accelerated rapidly over the last five years with the trend for secondary heads especially, becoming Executive heads, or Associate heads, or heads of federations. This trend has been driven by national and local policy and the difficulty of replacing primary headships in particular. In this rural county alone, in the last 12 months, over 40 schools, secondary and primary, have become part of federations and academy trusts. In these organisations sharing of principals in a variety of ways has become commonplace. This has meant less heads leading *more* schools and the inevitable decrease in time that heads spend in schools, with, consequently, less time to spend on face to face student leadership.

But for me the opposite is the case: I have deliberately and instinctively become increasingly visible and very outward facing to the students, remembering always the words of Tim Brighouse when describing the effect on students that a friendly and informed comment by the principal can have (Brighouse lecture Devon education conference West Point April 2005), and his message, also confirmed by Davies (2009:72), that every step you take outside the door of your office as principal, will be scrutinised for clues as to what you think is important or not, by students and staff alike. And being visible and accessible to students, which I see as characteristic of my leadership, has been a significant part of my day to day practice.

1.5. The Context

1.5.1 The Principal/Researcher

At this point it is desirable for the reader to be aware of the particular circumstances that contribute to the context of my occupation of the role of principal at Seaside town College, and the motivating factors embedded from my upbringing and childhood, that have led me to the post and to the research topic. For these are the lenses through which I view and construct my world and need bringing into the open, in order to remind the reader, that “it is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or at any stage of the research process” (Wellington et al 2005: 21). This approach is consistent with the socio cultural and constructivist/interpretivist perspectives that underpin the research and which are described fully in Chapter 3.

I have been in post at Seaside town since September 2003. For five years previously I was principal of a smaller (550 students), rural Community College, in the same Local Authority and before that, deputy headteacher of a large comprehensive school, just three miles distant from the location of my current school. Unusually, I live in the town, and was resident there when appointed; my son was a Year 10 student at the college when I arrived. For me the appointment as principal to this school perhaps carried a higher level of investment than normal. I had known it as a resident and parent, as well as having close contextual knowledge of it as a school, within the same local authority as my previous two schools. I had always had a roughly formulated plan to be in a position to apply for the post when it became available.

I am sure that my appointment was made with improvement in mind. Within the authority I had a reputation as an improving principal from my previous appointment and came with an agenda for change. My previous college had been designated as having *serious weaknesses* when I was appointed in 1999 and had moved to *Good* three years later. At that college, results had moved from 39% of students achieving 5 A-C passes, to 60% in four years. The position at Seaside town was similar when I arrived.

Following a history degree at a Redbrick University and secondary PGCE qualification in Physical Education and History, my teaching career had begun in 1978 as a teacher of Physical Education at an 11-18 comprehensive school in the South East of England. Various posts here, including Assistant Head of Year, Head of Year, and Head of History prepared me for the role of Head of House in an 11-16 school in another West Country county, which I commenced in 1985. During my eight years here, I was promoted to the Senior Leadership team and moved in 1993 to the post of deputy headteacher mentioned above. Observers might infer that a consistently progressive and planned career path has been followed. However, it did not feel like that at the time. I did not enter the profession with a calling or with a predetermined plan to end up as a principal or head teacher.

As an only child from a working class background, whose father was a painter and decorator and mother a part time office worker, I was the first from the family to go into Higher Education. I was a child of the midlands in the austere mid 1950s, loved and cared for by parents who wanted me to do well but who had no real experience of how this might best happen. On passing the 11 plus, I entered a middle class world of rugby and monthly class testing, where I could demonstrate how good (or not) I was in comparison to the rest. On reflection, these were formative years for a boy passionate about sport and who wanted to do well.

So what relevance has this to the project? It gives the reader an opportunity to understand the researcher's personal context and to understand what shaped the motivation and direction of this particular principal in his school leadership and his student leadership. It may offer some understanding as to why I chose to spend my career in the state maintained sector and why I am a passionate advocate of comprehensive education. It may offer understandings of how these formative experiences have contributed to a personal belief that success in my career is possible. But mostly these descriptions may also help the reader to understand the formative experiences that lead to an educational outlook or philosophy which might be described as transformative. My beliefs in this are

that anyone from any background can compete; every possible opportunity needs to be provided for all children; academic qualifications are life changing; school years are formative; children go to school for friendship, sport, music and drama and that we are privileged as teachers to be in a position to make these things happen.

1.5.2. The School

For similar reasons as those described above, it is important to provide the reader with further detail about the school context. The school is a mixed, 11-18, comprehensive of about 1100 students including a Sixth Form of 200. It is the only secondary school in a small coastal town (population of 15,000) and takes most of the eligible secondary age children from the town. However, the ability of children entering the school is slightly below that of other schools nationally, as there is an option for parents to send children to selective schools in the neighbouring, unitary authority. Approximately 25% of the students have identified special educational needs which is slightly above the national average, as is the number of children eligible for Free School Meals, which is 20%. The ethnic makeup of the town and school is overwhelmingly white British.

The social and economic status of the students reflects that of the town. Despite the impression on entry to the town of middle class comfort, there are considerable areas of deprivation. The town contains two of the most deprived wards in the county (MDI 2007); one is situated in the town centre and the other in a large council estate in the West of the town. In contrast, housing in the East of the town is more spacious and expensive. Students from all areas and backgrounds sit together and this gives the school a very clear inclusive and comprehensive ethos. Students leave at 16 or 18 and go into a wide range of destinations. These include HEIs, occasionally Oxbridge, Further Education, work with training or employment. This is mostly local trades and services and very few become NEET. However, students do not go far. Leavers' destination data have shown over the last 9 years that they like the school, the town and

the area. Most stay locally and those entering HE tend to stay in the South within reach of home and then many return. Consequently developing aspirations has always been seen as a priority of the school.

In 2003 GCSE results were low compared to national average with 35% of students achieving 5 or more GCSEs above Grade C. This was the benchmark measure at the time and placed the school as one of the worst performing schools in the county prompting the Local Authority to designate it as a *school causing concern*. Since then a rapidly improving profile in each of the succeeding 9 years has given the school a very good reputation and consequent over subscription. During this time the GCSE outcomes continued to improve dramatically reaching 63% of students attaining the new benchmark figure of 5 GCSEs at C or above, including English and Maths, and 93% gaining 5 or more passes above C in 2011. Even more impressive were the 2009, 2010, 2011 progress measures which indicated that all students made better progress at this school than they would at 93% of other schools in the country. Two Ofsted inspections, in 2007 and 2010 graded the school *good with outstanding features*.

1.6 The Purpose of the Project

Within this very bounded and ideographic context of a socially motivated principal holding the leadership role in a school requiring improvement my project's aim is to awaken researchers' awareness to the possibility that a principal's leadership of his students, which may have a direct effect on students' school experience, is worthy of a place in the wider field of school leadership research. It is original in its methodological approach by the researcher's insider location and seeks to overcome the ethical difficulties of a practising principal researching his own leadership behaviours, with his own students, in an innovative manner. In overcoming these difficulties and in seeking to explore and describe, rather than to produce or test theory, the project aims to present original data of richness and strength from a different

perspective: that of secondary age students describing an aspect of their school experience.

It is a case study of my own practice of leadership with my own students focusing on the concept of student leadership; but the findings may contribute to the longer, continuing investigation of school leadership, in the context of a wider debate about school effectiveness and improvement. This intellectual commitment to improvement, this single focus aimed at improving outcomes, this desire to do the job as well as I can, has occupied my professional thoughts and may be said to characterise my leadership since I entered Senior Leadership in 1994, and has continued to the present day. This is a search for the elusive factors of what good school leaders do more of, than those who are not; a search for the factors that make it work for me.

Chapter 2

A Review of Relevant Literature

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes (Marcel Proust)

2.1. A Conceptual Framework

Lakoff and Johnson describe how we conceive of theory by utilising the metaphor of buildings (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 105) and it is useful to bear this in mind when considering the suggestion that “research questions are inevitably theoretically informed” Silverman (2006:13). This reminds us that the task of constructing the framework of concepts underpinning a research investigation does not sit outside the process of research, but is one of its central and unique features. Pring (2004) describes the iterative nature of this framework and the need for researchers to make clear the basis for the structure of this edifice of ideas:

“such a framework of ideas is not, as it were, in the world waiting to be absorbed. It is what we bring to our observations of that world. It shapes the observations we made” (Pring 2004:77).

This chapter explores the relevant literature about the concepts which make up the theoretical framework supporting the research investigation into an area of my practice as a school principal. These need bringing into the light so that the links between them, those bridging connections, from the foundation to the topping out stone, can be examined, weighed, challenged and understood by reader and researcher. In doing so, the review will draw out the salient issues from the literature that are related to and which help form the research questions for this study, and identify gaps in the research that the enquiry might address. This is a model of conceptual structuring, loosely based on work by Shields and Tajalli (2006:270) which they describe as ‘intermediate’ theory.

At the outset, however, it is recognised that the ideas which form the conceptual structure for my project come from an extensive range of both

educational and personal perspectives. From my position as researcher but also a teacher of 34 years' experience, including 14 as a principal, these perspectives are difficult to separate. The *total* number of conceptual building blocks contributing to ideas supporting my search for student leadership would be too numerous to explore: these could include every personal conceptual understanding that make up my view of the world and every professional educational concept I use and have assimilated during my professional career.

2.2. The Architecture of the Review

2.2.1. Researcher's Existing Knowledge and Assumptions

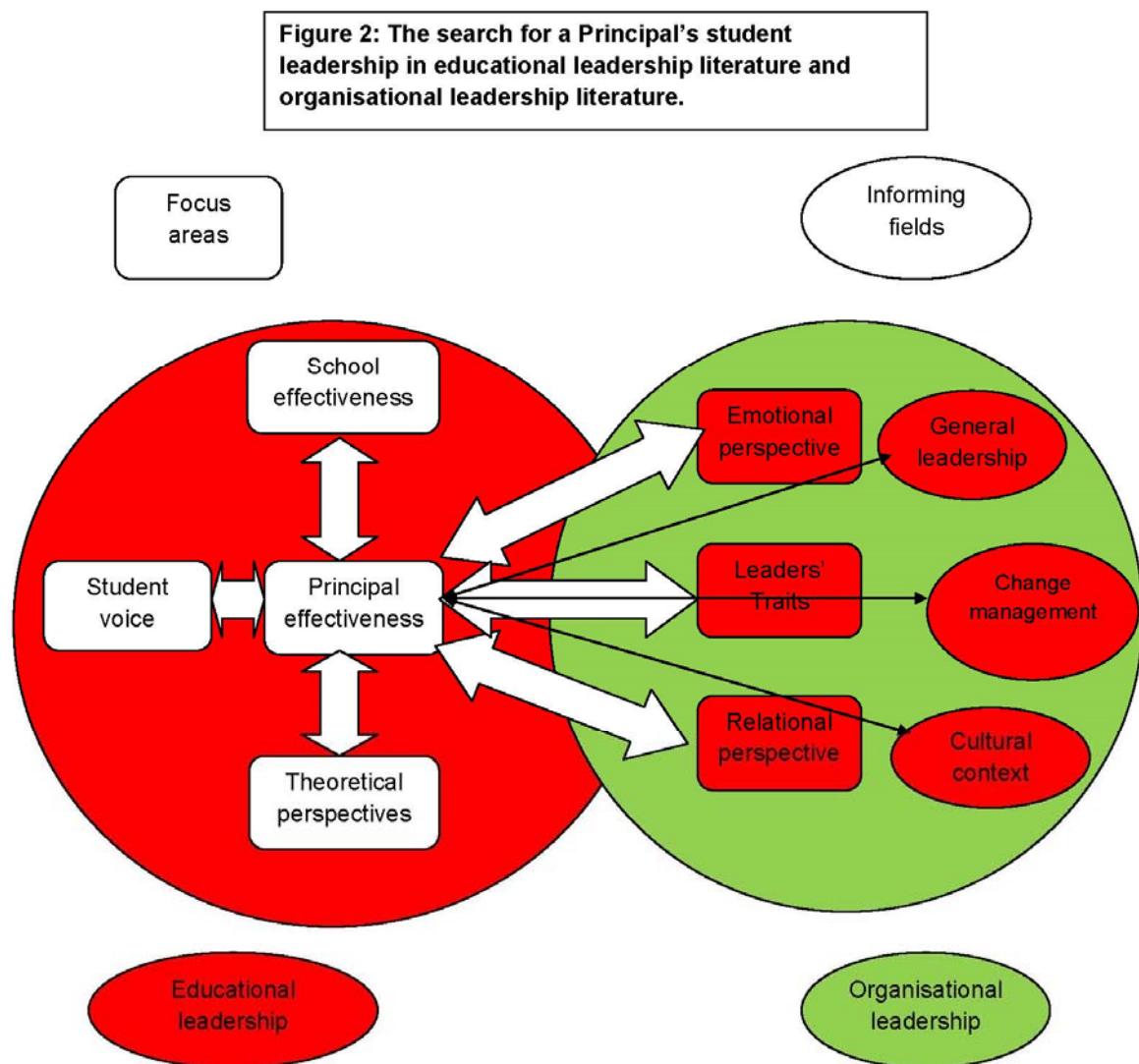
It could be said, that the starting point for the review of the research literature into my topic, was to assess my own knowledge of educational leadership literature, accumulated first of all, from a previous academic project and secondly, from my general professional interest. This reflection began the search, to discover clues about the nature and place of student leadership in the very broad field of educational leadership literature. The previous project was a Master's level study investigating the change management strategies and the effectiveness of them, a new principal employed in turning around a school with 'serious weaknesses' (Gray 2002). The study investigated the existing literature on change management in schools, including work by Schon (1971), Handy (1990), Argyris and Schon (1996), Fullan (1991, 1992) and Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) amongst others. Whilst this reading was of immediate relevance to that project in a very different context, and was of general use in other ways in understanding my leadership journey, this research appeared to throw little light on the concept being explored for this study. Alongside change management, another research field was studied in depth for the earlier study: that of school and organisational culture. In particular, the work of Argyris (1978), Deal and Kennedy (1983) and Sergiovanni (1992), proved to be insightful for that project and although an interesting perspective for the current study, it seemed an unfruitful avenue to explore in greater detail.

My knowledge from reading in more general educational leadership and some organisational leadership literature was also a useful filter, for deciding areas of research literature to focus on for this study. My reading of educational leadership literature is eclectic, but works by Handy and Aitken (1990), Brighouse (1991), Sergiovanni (1992), Handy (1994) and Hargreaves (1997), certainly form part of my early ideas about principal leadership. More recently, texts that have proved influential to me would include Fullan (1992), Stoll and Fink (1996), Wasserberg (2000), Hargreaves and Fink (2004), Elmore (2004), Strike (2007), West Burnham (2008), Macbeath (2009), Brent Davies (2009) and Lumby and English (2010). There are others but these give a flavour of the humanistic, ethical and relational perspectives to school leadership that I have been drawn towards. However, it is difficult to estimate the influence of these works on the selection of research topic, or the methodological approach chosen, or the research questions themselves. What can be said with more certainty is that none of them offered clues to the nature of principal student leadership, or its possible effects on students. Similar conclusions were drawn from my reading of organisational leadership literature such as Collins (2001), Senge (2006), Kouzes and Posner (2007), or specific readings about a particular kind of leadership; the leadership displayed by soldiers in the trenches in World War 1, which I felt at one stage, may contain some analogous elements to student leadership, for example, Sheffield (2000).

However, it was through my general reading described above and searches in search engines such as Google scholar, that I discovered the field of principal effectiveness literature. Initially this was through the work of Leithwood, for instance Leithwood et al (2004) and Leithwood (2005), but also Day et al (2008) amongst others. It was from this reading that the architecture of the literature review emerged with the key focus areas being those described below. The initial foci were the existing literature on principal student leadership, school effectiveness, principal effectiveness, the related theoretical perspectives of principal effectiveness and student voice. Some teacher effectiveness literature, especially Campbell et al (2004), formed part of the examination of school effectiveness research but was considered too broad to pursue as a separate focus area. From these foci, other key areas emerged in the affective

dimension of school leadership: these included relational leadership' especially from the perspective of social capital formation and emotional leadership. Affective measures are usually seen as an indication of students' overall happiness and satisfaction with school life (Kyriakiades 2005: 115). A final area, leaders' traits, was investigated following the findings of the study investigated as part of the review of existing literature on student leadership (Moos et al 1998).

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic portrayal of the literature architecture, picturing its key focus areas and informing concepts, from both educational leadership and organisational leadership research literature.



2.2.2. Existing Literature on Principals' Student Leadership

It became clear, early in the search for studies within the field of principal effectiveness, for research that sought to identify the effect of a principal's student leadership, that the field was very thin. Despite much searching through electronic databases, including JSTOR, EBSCO, ERIC and national theses databases, it was apparent that neither had the concept been identified, nor had very little principal effectiveness research pursued the views of students, about how they perceived effective principal leadership. Whilst in some ways proving to be a disappointing and daunting discovery, this turned out to be confirmatory in the choice of investigation purpose and methodology, as very little investigation from an insider position, or using students as participants, could be found. It became clear that the idea of a principal's student leadership could be viewed as a proto concept; and as such the research questions posed in the study leading to its description, and its perception by students, seemed to be those required to fill clear gaps in knowledge about this area of principal leadership.

However, one study did emerge that had research aims which were close to the current project. The project '*Effective Leadership in a Time of Change*' involved 10 lead researchers from four countries and emerged in an attempt to explore approaches to leadership in Denmark, Scotland, England and Australia. The framing concept was the rapidly changing leadership landscape and the tension between increasing accountability placed on headteachers and their ability to focus on developing effective practices. A particular aim was to discover the expectations that different groups had of heads, including heads themselves, governors, parents and the children in their schools. It was the data collected and analysed from school children by three of the researchers and reported by Moos et al (1998) that provided the only similar set of perceptions from children to those collected as part of this study.

Despite there being differences between the studies, most clearly noted in the methods used to collect data (Focus Group v questionnaire survey); size and

national spread (small scale and local v large and international) and purpose of the project (descriptive/illuminative/ exploratory v quantifying), the international study did provide an indication of a range of the perceptions that students have of headteachers, and the areas of questioning that proved fruitful. Table 2.1 lists the main findings of the international study in respect of older students' views of what makes a good headteacher.

	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>No. of phrases</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>No. of phrases</i>	<i>Scotland</i>	<i>No. of phrases</i>
1	Listens	37	Fair	16	Listens	67
2	Talks with pupils	36	Good relationships with pupils/ teachers	9	Is understanding	55
3	Kind	30	Accessible/ approachable	7	Treats children fairly	46
4	Nice to pupils	29	Caring	7	Strict/good discipline	45
5	Treats pupils equally	24	Understands pupils	7	Someone to talk to/talks to us	45
6	Keeps school nice, clean/ orderly	23	Takes account of pupils' opinions	6	Good relationships with pupils	44
7	Takes care of pupils	19	Good listener	6	Sense of humour/good fun	35
8	Manages the school	16	Responsible	5	Looks after/ capable of running school	27
9	Respectable	15	Treats people equally	5	Is nice/kind	24
10	Understands pupils	14	Maintains discipline	4	Not too strict	21

Table 2: 1. Older pupils' responses to the question 'what is a good headteacher?' (Moos et al 1998 in Macbeath and Myers 98:11)

The findings of this international study, especially that which suggests that students have clear and different perceptions of their headteachers and that personal characteristics of the headteacher mattered to the students, were

influential in shaping the research questions for this project. These questions, which were designed to seek answers from students about their concept of student leadership, their perceptions of its characteristics and the nature of their relationship with the principal, have clear connections to the Moos study. Interestingly, one other study from the research literature that was found linking principal leadership and students drew the same conclusion about the importance of personal qualities. The suggestion of this more recent large scale study was that “in our previous review (Leithwood et al, 2006), we argued that variation in the effectiveness of leaders is often explained by a small number of personal traits; indeed, research points to evidence of an association between leaders’ personal qualities and leadership success” (Day et al, 2010:7), although less empirical evidence was offered in support of this.

2.3. Focus Areas

2.3.1 Student Voice

As well as identifying a paucity of studies researching any connection between principals and their student leadership, the review of literature of principal effectiveness found little other research, other than that mentioned above, which asked students for their views on principals’ leadership. This study aims to address the omission, by offering participant students an opportunity to have a voice and express their opinion in the matter of the relationship between themselves and their principal.

The claims for the student voice agenda are strong. This movement which has developed over the last 30 years, it is suggested, “continues to grow and influence discussion across all levels of education” (Mitra 2003: 294). Furthermore, supporters suggest it continues to gather momentum in all sections of education in the UK, with claims that it can lead to a transformation in pupil-teacher relationships (Rudduck and MacIntyre 2007). The essential thesis powering the movement is that pupil consultation on matters of curriculum, pedagogy and other areas of their school experience can, through consultation, lead to a transformation of teacher-pupil relationship; a

transformation in teachers' practices and pupils having a new sense of themselves as members of a community of learners. Proponents of the agenda such as Rudduck et al (1996), Rudduck and Flutter (2000), Mitra (2003 and 2004), Rudduck and MacIntyre (2007), and Serriere and Mitra (2012), point to its presence in New Labour's education policy, especially it being a key dimension of both citizenship education and personalised learning. It has been seized upon by some researchers, for example Rudduck and Flutter (2000), and a previous government minister, Milliband (2004), as a means of school improvement, although others such as Thomson and Gunter (2006), feel that this is restrictive and unrealistic referring to it as being "harnessed firmly to the yoke of school improvement, rather than existing as a public good in and of itself" (Thomson and Gunter 2006:842).

The theoretical underpinning of the concept can be controversial and depends on a view that sees learning as being constructed by the learner and not just being handed down by a teacher. As a result, it focuses on the primacy of the *context* of the learning and the view that learning will only happen if it is personalised to what students value and if it is delivered with them having been consulted. This context can be both part of an organisational or other external environment such as the classroom, or the learner's personal context. Another problematic issue that has been raised has been the existence of barriers to research discovering the "authentic student voice" (Thomson and Gunter 2006).

But despite the view that it is currently "under theorised and underdeveloped as a means of school improvement" (Serriere and Mitra 2012: 17), the use of student participants expressing their opinions of their principal's student leadership, in a very personalised and institutionalised context, clearly connects the claims of the student voice movement to this study. By using student voice to describe how students perceive student leadership, the study avoids, or at least tries to avoid, what has been described as simply "the researcher's construction of the situation" (Rudduck et al 1996:3). As these authors note, "the depth of understanding and powers of observation that

students bring is often overlooked, often not sought and often misunderstood” (ibid).

The claim that pupil consultation and pupil participation improves relationships with teachers, which itself then has an effect on a range of student outcomes such as engagement and self efficacy (Cook-Sather 2004), (Levin 2006), provides interesting parallels with ideas arising from this project. And although the literature on listening to students' voices is broad, this project would fall into the recognised category of student voice research that gathers students' perspectives on their experiences in schools and engages students in the process of research itself. (Rogers 2006:212). As the literature on student voice suggests it is the voice of adults that is most prominent in matters of educational research. Teachers, academic researchers, parents, provide much of the opinion and participant data, whether self reported or observational in qualitative projects. This is especially true of the next focus areas of the literature review: the key concept of school effectiveness

2.3.2. School Effectiveness

School effectiveness is an understandably personal and professional foundational concept for this investigation into an element of my practice. As a school principal I am constantly judging the effectiveness of what happens in my school, assessing what works and what doesn't work. Others too, especially national government, governors, parents, Local Authority, and students make an assessment of how effective the school is on a regular basis, especially in terms of its position in relation to other local schools in published national league tables. Space will not allow a full examination and review of the historical literature describing research into the concept of school effectiveness. This has been carried out more extensively by other researchers from both critical (Barker 2007, Gorard 2010) and supportive perspectives (Teddle and Reynolds 2000, Macbeath and Mortimore 2001, Macbeath 2004). However, this section of the review examines some of the school effectiveness research, both old and

new, which is relevant in locating my position as both researcher and principal and the position of the study in relation to school effectiveness.

My teaching career began in 1978, ten years after the publication of the Plowden report. This extensive examination of the condition of primary education in England, the first since 1931, gave an upbeat, optimistic message of the possibilities that creative primary curricula offered. Commissioned in 1963 by the Labour government, it reflected an “optimism and belief in social engineering” (Kogan 1987:13) of its time and set out how curriculum, personalisation, creativity and involvement of parents could make a difference in outcomes for children. However, this report, a seminal, underpinning canonical work for many beginning teachers of the 1970s, was based on a ‘deterministic’ ontology: the view that a child’s future was predetermined by social status and accident of birth, which overpowered the influence of other factors such as schooling, on their outcomes or prospects. At the time, recent research by Coleman et al (1966) involving 645,000 secondary and elementary students in the US had indicated that “educational attainment was largely independent of the schooling a child received” (cited by Rutter 1979:1). Later, Jencks et al (1972) in re examining Coleman’s data drew similar conclusions suggesting that additional school expenditure would be “unlikely to increase achievement and redistributing resources will not reduce test score inequality” (in Rutter 1979:1). In the UK also, research from a socio linguistic perspective had pointed to the socially determined nature of acquired language patterns of middle class and working class children (Bernstein 1971), leading the author to suggest that “education cannot compensate for society” (in Rutter 1979:2).

However, challenges to this view emerged from both UK and US researchers. In the US, Edmonds (1979) found significant differential outcomes for students in similar urban schools noting what he called varying “determinants of achievement” (Edmonds 1979:10). In the UK, following on from Plowden, a report commissioned by the Inner London Education Authority in 1970 collected data from the secondary sector to investigate the effects of schooling on students’ attainment, behaviour and attendance. This report was published in

1979 and established that children of similar abilities achieved differently depending on the school they attended (Rutter et al 1979). This was an extensive report, which used student outcome data and questionnaire and interview data from headteachers and teachers from 12 London secondary schools, and comparative data from schools on the Isle of Wight. Its conclusions were reached after a rigorous examination of organisational, cultural and operational differences, including school hours, size, organisation of teaching, teaching styles and school climate amongst many others.

The reports of Edmonds and Rutter paved the way for other large scale studies into what became known as 'school effectiveness' research. Further work, over subsequent years, across a wider range of schools provided evidence which confirmed the existence, in more effective schools, of variables which had a measureable, co relational effect on student outcomes. For instance in the primary sector Sammons et al (1995) and Mortimore (1998) argued convincingly, that the *school* effects on reading outcomes were four times more important than the background factors of age gender and social class, and ten times more important for Mathematics. The subsequent emergence of the School Effectiveness and School Improvement (SESI) movement and its search to identify key variables affecting school effectiveness enabled the editors of the newly inaugurated eponymous journal in 1990 to convincingly assert that "schools matter, that schools do have major effects upon children's development and that, to put it simply, schools do make a difference" (Reynolds and Creemers 1990: 1)

However, the concept of school effectiveness, described by proponents as staking "its claim around an ontology of the unitary organisation combined with the rational epistemology of cause and effect connections between what schools do and pupil outcomes" (Gunter 2001: 33) has not remained unchallenged. Opponents have been critical of this view of the way schools operate. It has been criticised as "overly simplistic, often ignoring the complex and nuanced nature of educational settings and seeking too readily, to identify causal links between schools and outcomes for students" (MacGilchrist et al

2004: 20). Others have emphasised its initial political and social motivation (Gorard 2010a), its support for “market and managerial policies in education, which are in turn inequitable and anti-educational” (Thrupp 2001:2) and its problematic “attribution of causality” (Coe 2009: 363).

In the main, however, criticism has focused on the very narrow definition of effectiveness employed by school effectiveness researchers. The measure utilised is relative success in examinations, ignoring other indicators of effectiveness, such as the extent to which students are engaged, student attendance, student routes into further education, future student participation in higher education, student aspiration and preparation for citizenship. This academic measure, although generally accepted by governments as a robustly universal and standardised measure in the UK, has itself been criticised. A recent paper examining this “dominant approach to evaluating school performance” finds “fatal flaws in its logic,” and suggests “that it is time to stop using this now traditional, but limited, view of what schools are for” (Gorard 2010a:746). School Effectiveness (SE) research has also been accused of ‘ignoring the structural impediments of poverty and inequality and of addressing only a political agenda’ (Fielding 1997: in MacGilchrist et al 2004:29) whilst another strongly critical view of the relentless focus on school improvement, pointed to the resulting exclusion of other aspects of school education, and criticised its narrow approach and its promotion of a “simplistic, *heroic*, school leader solution” to school improvement (West Burnham 2009).

Recent effectiveness research such as Campbell et al (2004), however, recognises more the complexity and contingent nature of schools and has identified that the classification of a whole school as effective or ineffective, based on cohort wide examination results, is misleading. This research evidence suggests a more complex picture, showing that it is the variance of teacher performance *within* schools that has the significant effect on student outcomes: in other words the important variance is *within* schools rather than *between* schools. Further evidence for the effects of what has become known as “within school variation” (Reynolds 2008) has been offered by Stringfield

Reynolds & Shaffer (2008), supporting the claim “that while schools of themselves can make a difference, there are even more significant effects at the level of department and classroom” (Macbeath and Mortimore 2001:2).

However, attempts at unpicking what has been described as “the complexity of the relationships in every day school life” (Reynolds 2007), in order to establish and identify the relevant variables that make a difference to teacher effectiveness and school effectiveness, continue to remain problematic. The development of more sophisticated analytic models namely Multi-level Modelling (MLM) (Goldstein 1995) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) (Raykov and Marcoulides 2000) have enabled more nuanced claims to be made. Multi-level modelling has allowed researchers to separate out the interacting variables at the social, school, classroom and individual student levels. This has been particularly important for identifying the contribution to variance made at the classroom level, including the effect of teaching. These models built on Creemers’ model of ‘effectiveness’ (Creemers and Reitzig 1996) which was able to predict that classroom variables would have the greatest effect of any school-based factors. This model has been tested empirically (Kyriakides 2005), and the prediction that the classroom effect was the largest turned out to be supported (Campbell et al 2004). In short, this robust evidence means that a child in a school recognised as effective, but with a less effective teacher, could be doing less well than a child in a less effective school but with a better teacher.

From the perspective of this investigation it is these and other developments in the field of school effectiveness research that recognise effects at different levels that are of significance. At the school level, variables such as the social mix of pupils, differences in social class, ethnicity, and gender have been found to have little effect on their own (Creemers and Reizigt 1996, Thrupp 2001, Harris 2002, McGilchrist et al 2004, Sammons 2007). It is true that when taken together, they can be seen to be more powerful but research demonstrates that classroom level variance, especially the differentiated effects of teachers for instance, Campbell et al (2004) and Kyriakides (2005), have greater

potential for effects on student outcomes. A recent large scale study for example, points to research which demonstrates that effective and improving schools work at classroom level to reduce within school variation (Day et al 2010:10) and it is here that this investigation is focused. It is located at a level different from that of research seeking effects at a school level: it is seeking the effects of a variable that exists at a student level, ‘leadership of students’ which may be one of those that have been described as having “synergistic effects; the accumulation of small effects in the same direction” (Day et al 2009: 10).

2.3.3 Principal Effectiveness

If the concept of school effectiveness supports the basis of my professional belief and underpins this study, then that of principal effectiveness could be described as sitting at the heart of both. The belief that my role in school is important and makes a difference to students is an essential element in the construct of my personal identity and consciousness. But it is not only from a personal viewpoint that this concept is central to the study. Gorard (2005) points out how for policy makers across the globe who turn to school improvement as a means to develop national economic positions, it is *school leadership* that has become their “chief conduit” and “management solution” the default model for solving the problem of schools who are deemed to be failing” (Gorard 2005:150), and it is easy to see why.

From the early research into school effectiveness, in the search for the variables that make one school achieve higher outcomes for students than another, the leadership of a school has regularly been identified as being important. For instance, in the US in 1979, Edmonds concluded that “urban schools that teach poor children successfully have strong leadership and a climate of expectation that students will learn” (Edmonds 1979: 1). In the UK, Mortimore leading a team of researchers in the first British *teacher* effectiveness project, the Junior School Project in 1988, involving 12 schools, found that “purposeful leadership of the staff by the Head Teacher” was significant among other factors associated with effectiveness (Mortimore et al 1988: 250).

Following on from this, another project, jointly led by Mortimore, this time a meta analysis of previous research, commissioned by Ofsted in the UK in 1994 and reported in 1995, identified ‘professional leadership,’ comprising of leadership that was ‘firm and purposeful,’ ‘participative’ in its approach and featured the principal as the ‘lead professional,’ as one of 11 factors common to effective schools (Sammons, Mortimore et al 1995). Although the authors recognise the dangers of oversimplification of a very complex organisational process and warn against assuming a direct causal relationship between leadership and outcomes, strong leadership was a consistently present variable in all of the studies included in the meta analysis. These researchers also point to the effectiveness of different styles of leadership in different school contexts, the contingent nature of the leadership and the inability of their research to distinguish between the effects of leadership and the specific effects of the leadership of the principal.

In other research since then, whether syntheses or reviews of previous research such as Cotton (2003), Ofsted (2003), Bell et al (2003), Leithwood et al (2004), Marzano et al (2005), Price Waterhouse Cooper (2007), McKinsey (2007), Robinson (2009), or both, Day et al (2009), Leithwood et al (2004); reviews of a selection of international studies Hallinger and Leithwood (1998), or original empirical research Leithwood and Jantzi(1999), Wiley (2001), Silins and Mulford, (2002) Day and Leithwood (2007) leadership has consistently been identified as a factor, to a greater or lesser extent, in making a difference to the effectiveness of schools.

The claims made for the significant effects of leadership on schools’ outcomes are strong: Sammons et al report that: “almost every single study of school effectiveness has shown both primary and secondary leadership to be a key factor” (Sammons et al 1995: 8). Gray, too, suggests that ‘the importance of the headteacher’s leadership is one of the clearest of the messages from school effectiveness research” (Gray 1999) whilst Fullan confidently exhorts us to

"begin with the first hard fact. Principals do make a difference in school improvement and student achievement" (Fullan 2008:1). Similarly, evidence from the UK primary sector enables Southworth to suggest that: "inside every successful school you will find effective leaders, and effective leadership and management are critical to a school's success" (Southworth 2009:92). Others assert the effect of leadership even more firmly. Leithwood and Riehl, for instance, suggest that "leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction" (Leithwood and Riehl 2003:4), and more recently West Burnham that:

"leadership is the most significant of a range of complex variables that determines the success of schools. Many variables cannot be controlled directly; of those that can, leadership is easily the most controllable and the one with greatest potential impact and leverage." (West Burnham 2009:2).

However, when links are sought which connect effective principals and specific student academic outcomes they are less visible and less convincingly demonstrated. This anomaly has been described as the 'Leadership paradox' (Barker 2007) and the search for these connections has become the investigative focus in the field with researchers seeking to discover actually what it is that principals make a difference to; what are they being effective at?

The default assumption and hoped for answer of governments and policy makers is almost certainly that principals are effective at improving student academic outcomes. But it is in precisely this area that the evidence generated by research is less than certain. For instance, Bell et al (2003), reviewed 8 studies from across the world, including two from the UK, and found that although "the overall evidence indicates that headteacher leadership and management does make a difference to pupil performance" (Bell et al 2003:1) it was rather lukewarm in its conclusion that "all eight studies reviewed provided some evidence that school leaders can have some effect on student outcomes, albeit *indirectly*" (Bell et al 2003: Summary) (my italics). At the same time a review of 37 international studies concluded that there was almost no relationship between student outcomes and school leadership (Witziers et al 2003). This echoes the similarly tepid note sounded in a previous meta analysis of principal effectiveness research from 1990-1995 which found that "principal

effects are small and need very sophisticated research designs to detect" (Hallinger and Heck 1996).

Other research too, has found little, or only weak, evidence of the effects of leadership on student outcomes: one US study has found that it is other factors, such as social and economic situation (SES), and other environmental and organisational factors that were more important than leadership in affecting outcomes of a sample of US high school students (Leitner 1994). Another study, this time a case study of an exceptional school in the South of England, widely recognised as having an exceptional and transformational headteacher, draws the conclusion that although the head changed the context and internal processes of the school, it is background variables which "seem to explain most of the apparent improvement in student outcomes" (Barker 2007: 21). The study concluded that "once allowance has been made for intake, leadership appears to become a marginal factor" (*ibid*). More recently another large scale synthesis of previous leadership effectiveness research lists leadership as only 74th out of 138 'principles' or factors that affect student outcomes. In this study, leadership effects are given a co relational factor of 0.25, concluding that school leaders have an effect of between 3-5% on student outcomes (Hattie 2009:73).

One of the main problematic issues in defining the effect of principals on student outcomes has been the lack of standardised, nationally and internationally benchmarked measures, by which to measure and compare the effect. This description illustrates the nature of the measurement problem:

"in almost all leadership effects studies, to date, this measure is either an annual average or, at best, a change in an annual average performance on some outcome measure over several years. Such estimates can be seriously confounded by pupil cohort and other plausible influences that have nothing to do with school or leadership" (Leithwood and Day 2008a:2).

These authors seek to overcome the problem by using pupils' value-added attainment tests at national level over a sequential three-year period with the same headteacher in post, as its measure of the dependent variable, and a mixed methods methodological approach, which may prove to be the way

forward for future research. But reliable, like for like, equivalent comparisons of student outcomes are difficult to achieve and may always be hampered by the ineluctable factor of seemingly comparable assessment measures becoming harder or easier over time (Leithwood and Levin 2005, Barker 2007:35).

Another difficulty of a lack of standardised comparable data is further extended when the effect of leadership on outcomes of different subjects are compared. For instance, leadership studies have most often examined the effect of principals on mathematics and english test scores. An example of this approach is the study of Andrews and Soder (1987) who found that student achievement data revealed that the gain score of students in strong leader schools were significantly greater in both reading and mathematics than those of students in schools with average or weak leadership. However, as Marzano et al point out in their meta analysis of existing leadership research in the US from 1978-2000, it is impossible to generalise on the effectiveness of leadership on subject specific outcomes, without recognition of the significant contextual differences in these subjects (Marzano et al 2005: 28ff).

It does seem surprising then that after 40 years of research that there is still such a circumspect, contingent view of the extent of the effect of principals' influence over student outcomes. In a series of papers reporting at the half way stage of the most recent UK large scale research project investigating this link, the authors still remind us that whilst empirical evidence in support of the principal effect is "reasonably robust by now," it "has been slow to accumulate" (Leithwood and Day 2008a:1) and that :

"so far the evidence we have collected and analysed provides stronger empirical support for the view that there are important indirect effects of leadership on pupil outcomes in addition to those direct influences which headteachers exercise" (Day et al 2008a: 83).

One proposed suggestion for this uncertainty is that despite appearances to the contrary, there is still too small a body of empirical research evidence from which to draw firm conclusions. In a comparative analysis of the articles published in leading educational peer reviewed journals which featured in the

2001 UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), Gorard discovered a significant deficit and paucity of new empirical studies in the field of educational leadership. He indicates an over representation of “think pieces and literature reviews” leading him to conclude that “there may be many reasons for this, but here is our first indication of a difference between education management research and other education research fields—the proportion of non-empirical published work is higher” (Gorard 2005:4). In the same article he also points to a lack of research studies that are aimed at providing evidence of the impact of leadership on measurable outcomes. He comments that the field “is very inward looking, apparently unwilling to test the impact of leadership on anything but management itself” (Gorard 2005:5). Others such as Marzano et al (2005:6) and Spillane (2005) appear to agree and Robinson comments that “the literature on educational leadership is substantial, but only a small part of it focuses on the relationship between leadership and student outcomes.”(Robinson 2009: 35).

Whilst this paucity of new empirical data may have hindered research seeking links between student attainment outcomes and principals’ effectiveness, studies looking for effects on other measures have proved generally more successful although not universally conclusive. These other outcome measures which could be described as non academic, include attitudes to learning, participation in school, academic self concept, behaviour, engagement and student retention. Other areas that principal leadership has been convincingly linked to are listed by Marzano et al (2005). They include six clear areas of leadership effects that have their own body or research evidence, including school climate, students opportunity to learn, classroom practice of teachers, the organisation of curriculum and instruction, attitudes of teachers and the effect on mission and goals (Marzano et al 2005:5).

The nature of this exploratory investigation does not permit an in depth journey into the literature for each of these outcomes; studies exploring links between each of them and principal activity could be of relevance to this investigation. For instance, these may include those that examine school climate (Anderson

1982), and student engagement in the secondary sector (Silins and Mulford 2002). This latter study, the LOLSO, *Leadership for Organisational Learning and Student Outcomes* project, an Australian, government-funded, four-year research project, involving 96 secondary schools, over 5,000 students and 3,700 teachers and their principals, found strong evidence of a principal effect, albeit indirect, on participation in school, engagement with school and academic self-concept (Silins and Mulford 2002) and in particular, evidence of distributed leadership practices having an effect on engagement. However, when considered together, the literature surveyed exploring the outcomes of leadership effects does suggest that it is effects in a non academic dimension that might most be expected from a principal's student leadership.

Another explanation for the lack of conclusiveness in leadership effects research may be the different methodological approaches utilised in the research process. The majority of studies over the last four decades that have sought to establish a co relational effect between leader and student outcomes have been large scale and quantitative in nature: and there are many examples that could be cited to exemplify this approach. These would include those earlier studies cited above such as Plowden (1967), Rutter (1979), Mortimore (1988), Sammons et al (1995) in the UK and Coleman et al (1966) and Edmonds (1979), in the US. Others with a similar methodological approach would be the replication research by Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) investigating the effects of transformational leadership style on student engagement and student learning involving 2,424 teachers, and 7,251 students from 98 elementary schools in the Ontario district and the large scale mixed method UK study of Day et al (2009).

However, it has been generally in smaller studies of a qualitative nature that the stronger effects have been found. This is especially true in studies which have used a case study methodology; this by its very nature is usually set in more deprived 'exceptional' schools. This research usually features outlier schools such as the study by the US department for education by Johnson and Asara (1999) which examined the cases of nine highly effective elementary schools in

the state of Texas. The study found that strong *instructional* leadership featured in all of these schools; this mirrored similar findings in a study of high colour and low SES elementary schools (Sheurich 1998). Other rigorous qualitative research in this area includes that of Smylie et al (1999) which investigated the significance of the role of principals across different sectors in Chicago schools in implementing new decentralising and community engagement policies.

Large scale quantitative projects such as those described above may have stumbled over the problem of valid comparisons of student outcome data already mentioned, but more recent research has sought to overcome this problem by the use of sophisticated mixed paradigm methodology and more sophisticated theoretical modelling. A recent example of this is the three year UK research project *The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes*. This study successfully combined qualitative case study data with large scale quantitative analysis of student outcome data and produced rich and valid data demonstrating clear evidence of the link between principal activity and a range of student outcomes (Day et al 2009). So whilst principal effectiveness research still seeks to connect leadership activity with a range of student outcomes with a varying level of success, the nature of this enquiry, which seeks to define more clearly a possible leadership variable, student leadership, and which is looking for possible indications of its theoretical mechanism, points to the need for an examination of theoretical models that have been proposed.

2.3.4. Theoretical models of School Leadership

The difficulty presented to developers of theoretical models for principal effects research, just as for school effectiveness research, has been to overcome the problems created by the sheer complexity of schools with their myriads of moment by moment, multi layered, human interactions. Swaffield and Macbeath capture this complexity and the problems it can cause in gaining empirical research data about the effects of school leadership:

“in many studies of leadership, one of the problems is that leadership is daily and takes place amongst a myriad of activities and actions that accrue over time. Typical data collections strategies- interview,

surveys, or even observations and focus groups- often fail to show the interconnections and variety of activities, strategies and tactics that people come to learn” (Swaffield and Macbeth 2009:37).

To overcome these problems theoretical frameworks of principal effectiveness have developed in complexity and effectiveness since Hallinger and Heck’s review of the theoretical models employed in empirical research between 1980 and 1995 (Hallinger and Heck 1996). This study identified the theoretical approaches utilised in 40 criteria selected studies which has led to a useful categorisation of approaches. It was found that thirteen studies had utilised a theoretical framework based on a simplistic input, (principal behaviours) leading to output, (student outcomes) model (Hallinger and Heck 1996:13). Such bivariate studies were labelled *direct* effect studies and characterised as Model A approaches. These take no account of any mediating variables that may have an effect on student outcomes, such as teacher practice, classroom environment and instructional climate, or antecedent moderating values, such as student social background. Hallinger and Heck and others such as Anderson (1982) have been critical of such input/output studies in which “the process by which administrators achieve an impact is hidden by a black box; doing little “to advance our theoretical or practical understanding of the school processes through which the principal achieves and impacts on school effectiveness” (Hallinger and Heck 1996: 18)

However, in Hallinger and Heck’s review it was the studies that used a theoretical model which assumed that the effect of principals’ behaviour was mediated through other variables, in other words, *indirectly*, that were best able to demonstrate a positive effect on student outcomes:

“studies that are able to demonstrate a positive leadership effect on student outcomes are those that assume a model of mediated effects; that is a principal has an effect on outcomes and student learning through others, namely teachers, or by effecting school processes. This is consistent with the notion that managers achieve their results through other people.” (Hallinger and Heck 1996:18).

It is this conclusion that has been consistently reported in leadership effects’ studies over the years and could be described as its most robust finding. For

example Leithwood and Jantzi's (1999) replication of an earlier large scale study looking for the effects of transformational principal leadership in 94 elementary schools, found that studies that "inquire only about the direct effects of school leadership on student outcomes tend to report weak or inconclusive outcomes whereas studies that include mediating and/or moderating variables in their designs tend to report significant effects" (Leithwood and Jantzi 1999:454). Most recently, this conclusion has been restated by the authors of a large scale US study linking leadership to learning who state that "the effects of leadership on student learning are largely indirect. Studies designed to explore direct effects of leadership rarely detect significant effects, whereas many studies of indirect effects do" (Leithwood and Seashore Lewis 2012: 14).

The five models proposed to categorise the theoretical approaches of the studies examined by Hallinger and Heck are listed below in Figure 2.1.

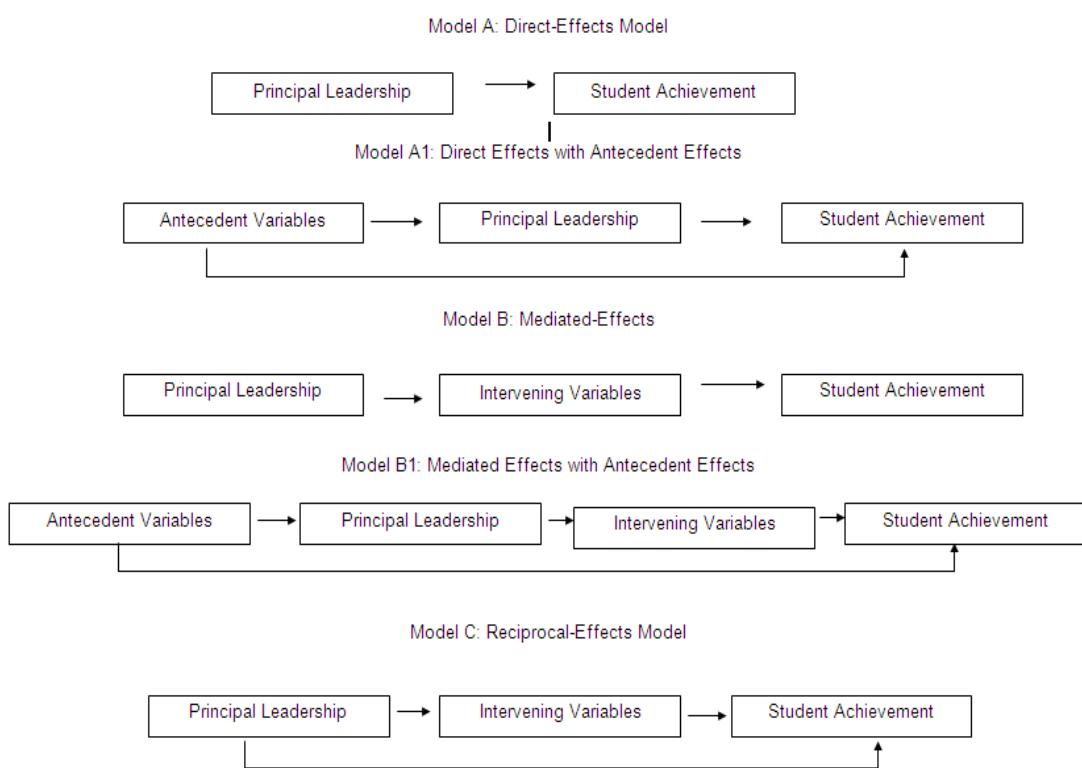


Figure 2:1 Theoretical Models of Principal Effects (Hallinger and Heck 1996:15)

This model, adapted from an earlier outline of theoretical approaches by Pitner (1988: 105-108 cited in Levacic 2005: 199) illustrates the essentially contextual

nature of school leadership and the need for theoretical models to take account of this. Hallinger and Heck found that the most robust and direct correlation between leadership and student outcomes, were found in those approaches that recognise “the complexity and context of the leadership.” Studies which were able to demonstrate such correlations were those that utilised B1 and C theoretical assumptions.

A more recent framework which the authors describe as “a tool for getting organised to test or develop a theory” and “not a theory of anything” (Day and Leithwood 2007:5) is included as Figure 2.2. This aims to show how the behaviours of principals (the independent variables) are influenced by who they are, their beliefs, experiences and values (the antecedent variables), and how the effect of these behaviours on student learning (the dependent variables) are enhanced or diminished by other sets of moderating variables such as the trust teachers have in the principal and other elements in the organisation such as culture (mediating variables).

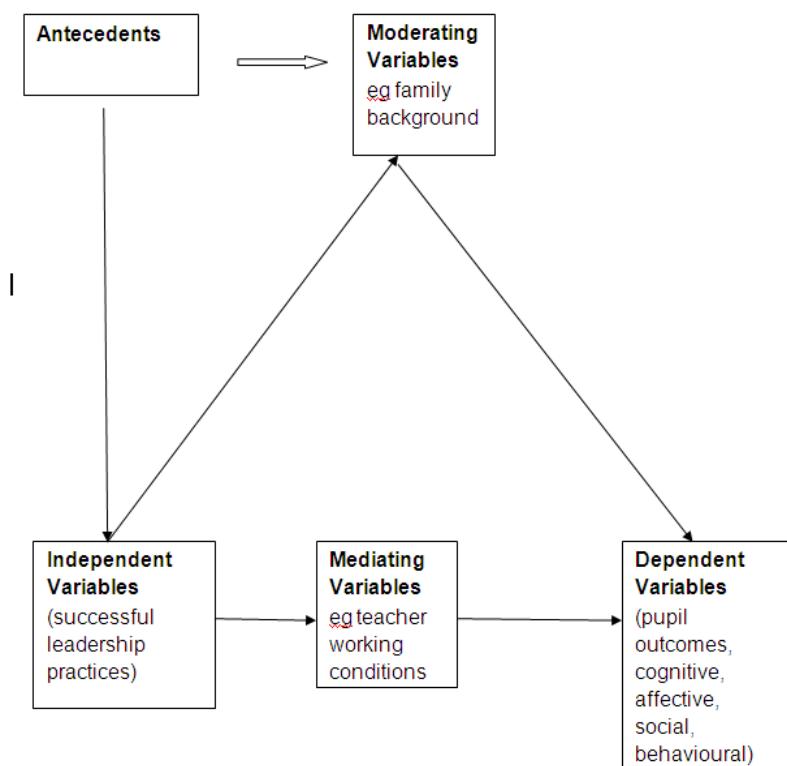


Figure 2.2: Framework for sampling knowledge about Principal Leadership (Day and Leithwood 2007:5)

Finally, the framework developed to guide the study of the recent large scale US investigation seeking how leadership from many sources, not just principals, influences student learning is included in Figure 2.3 (Leithwood and Seashore Louis 2012: xxvii).

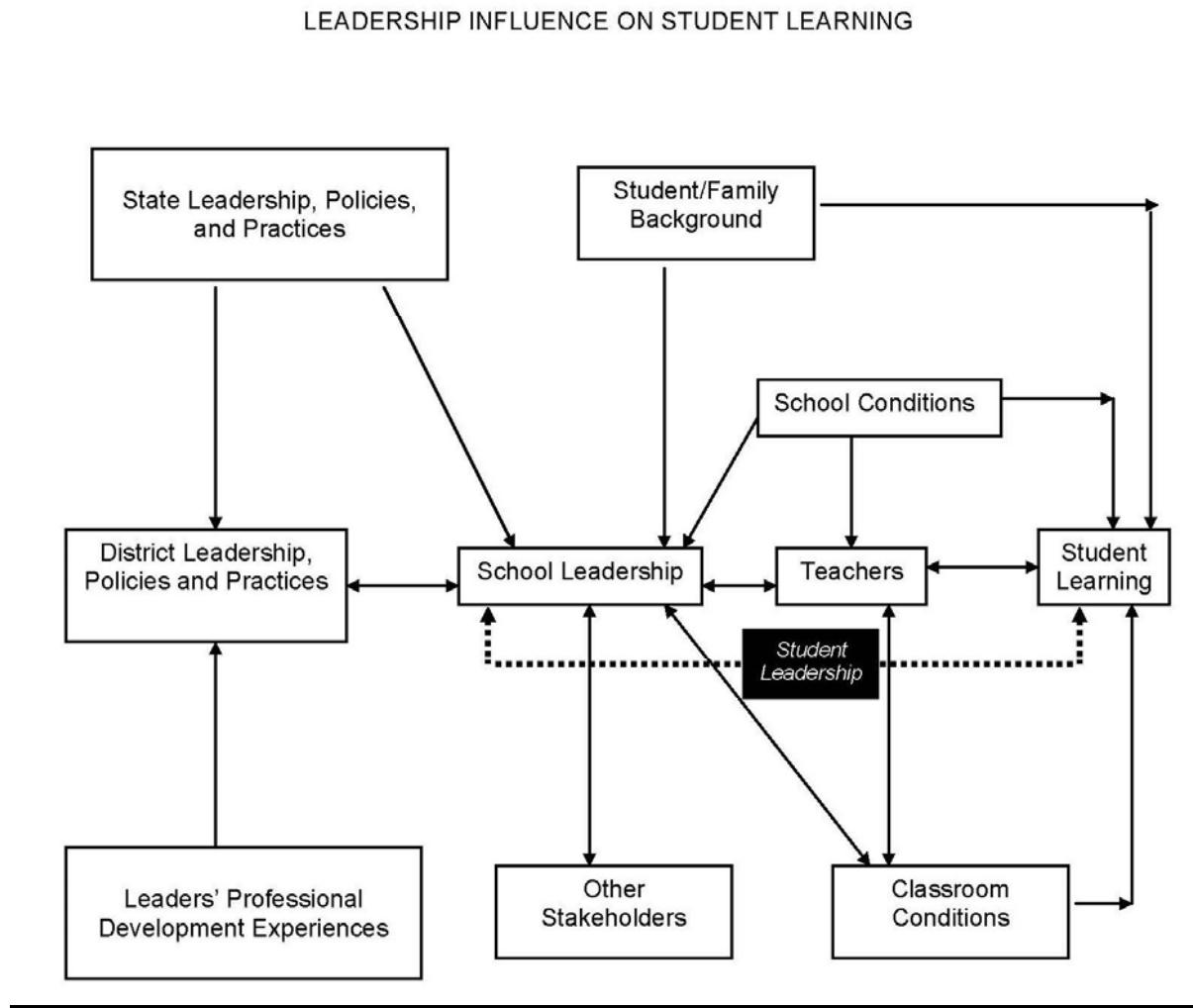


Figure 2:3: Leadership influences on student learning (Leithwood and Seashore Lewis 2012 xxvii)

This framework illustrates more realistically the busy leadership landscape in which principal leadership operates (here as a component of school leadership). Although most apposite to the US for which it was developed, the model probably more closely represents the real world of educational leadership and serves to allow a representation of student leadership to be included in the theoretical picture. Here it is conceptualised as a feature of school leadership practices but extrinsic to the others. It is superimposed on the figure as a

dotted line linking directly to students and their learning. This suggests an effect which may be moderated and mediated by the other variables affecting school leadership but at the same time displaying the possibility of a reciprocal but direct effect on student learning.

These theoretical frameworks are included as representative samples. They illustrate a range of locations for principal effectiveness from the Model A, direct principal effect models identified in studies reviewed by Hallinger and Heck (1996), to those in which the principal features in less sharp focus.

Nevertheless researchers continue to identify the instrumental role of school leaders at the heart of school effectiveness. The most recent research firmly takes this positive position (Leithwood et al 2004, Hattie 2009, Robinson 2009, Day et al 2009). For instance, Robinson “locates principals right at the centre of leading learning” and strongly acknowledges the role of leaders “in making a difference to student achievement outcomes” (Robinson 2009:28). Others too seem confident in recognising not only the effects of leaders, but in confirming the primacy of the head in affecting outcomes. ‘Claim One’ of the seven strong claims of school leadership identified in previous literature by Leithwood et al (2006), which is “supported by both the quantitative and qualitative evidence” is that the headteacher is recognised as ‘primus inter pares’ (Leithwood et al 2006:3).

Furthermore, the authors go on to suggest “that school staff perceive that it is headteacher leadership that remains the major driving force and which underpins their schools’ increased or sustained effectiveness and improvement”, a point which they highlight even more strongly in a later report defining ‘Ten Claims’ about school leadership:

“headteachers are perceived to be the main source of leadership by key school staff. Their educational values, reflective strategies and leadership practices shape the internal processes and pedagogies that result in improved pupil outcomes” (Day et al 2010:3).

In the final report the authors confidently assert that “the head is the main source of leadership in a school and plays the lead role in promoting change for

improvement" (Day et al 2010:19). They conclude "that more evidence has been uncovered to support our original finding that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Day et al 2009:1). With such strong confirmation it may seem reasonable to suggest that students too may perceive the principal to be the seat of leadership in the school. An important issue to explore through the data will be therefore, students' perceptions of the essential nature of the principal's leadership as either direct or indirect or both, along with any indication of a theoretical understanding of the way it affects them.

Large scale quantitative research projects seeking only to identify an effect of principal leadership on student outcomes have been criticised by researchers such as Southworth (2004: i). The criticism has been levelled because although such studies may identify a quantifiable effect and its extent, they ignore what is considered by many to be the key question: what are the behaviours of school leaders that make a difference? However, this is no easy question to answer and it is important to point out the considerable problems faced by researchers when attempting to link causes and outcomes to particular leadership behaviours. This following comment on organisational leadership, when leadership is viewed as an *influence process*, by which leaders influence others, (*followers*) to perform things they might otherwise not, conveys the problematic nature of this complexity:

"does the (*leader's*) behaviour effect the follower's behaviour or has the follower's behaviour effected the leader, eg. a correlation between consideration and subordinate performance is usually interpreted as showing that considerate leaders cause subordinates to be more motivated and productive. However it is possible that causality is in the opposite direction... causality operates in both directions, from behaviour to outcomes and vice versa" (Yukl 2002:56).

In other words leadership behaviour is influenced by a variety of factors making it both "an independent and dependent variable" (ibid: 431). The consequence of this is to make it extremely difficult to separate out clear causal links between, for example, leader traits, leader power, contingent demands and constraints, just to mention some of the behavioural variables, and the effects on students outcomes.

Nevertheless, many studies have attempted to explore the links between leadership practices and behaviours. These have been described as three kinds; eclectic, comparative and focused (Leithwood and Sun 2009: 2) and each seeks to ask different questions of leadership research evidence. Eclectic studies such as Marzano et al (2005) and Hallinger and Heck (1996) are wide ranging and seek the extent of the difference that leadership makes; comparative studies measure the relative influence of two or more approaches such as Robinson (2009), and focused studies interrogate evidence testing for expected theoretical outcomes (Leithwood and Jantzi 2005). But in each of these different types of study two leadership approaches feature most often: instructional and transformational leadership behaviours.

According to one recent large scale synthesis leaders are most effective when their behaviours are focused on the teaching and learning in their school, that is, when they are pedagogical leaders:

"they are most effective when they set clear pedagogical goals, when they develop staff consensus around those goals, when they provide the tools for teachers to achieve the goals, when they immerse themselves, as leaders, in the professional development associated with those goals, and when they foster trustful relationships in their schools" (Robinson 2009:19).

These behaviours are those associated with 'instructional leadership.' This approach has been described as referring "to those principals who have their major focus on creating a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and higher teacher expectation for teachers and students"(Hattie 2009:83). Other research too has focused on instructional leadership behaviours, those which focus on changing for the better what happens in the classroom, those that are directed at the way students learn, such as their participation and leadership of teacher training and curriculum reform, (Bossert et al 1982, Andrews and Soder 1987, Leitner 1994, Creemers and Reitzigt 1996, Fidler 1997, Johnson 1999, Hallinger 2005).

These studies have identified varying strengths of connection with effects on student outcomes and instructional behaviours; other research however, suggests that leadership behaviours that could be described as ‘transformational’ have at least equal effects on a range student outcomes. A recent review of published and unpublished research of the effects of transformational leadership practices found little evidence of effect on student academic achievement but as anticipated, strong evidence of effects on teacher belief and emotions and some school conditions (Leithwood and Sun 2009). Transformational leadership has been described as the current image of “ideal practice” (Leithwood and Sun 2009: 2). In contrast to instructional leadership, this transformational leadership is very much more centred on inspiring adults, the teaching staff, to deliver better learning. Hattie describes this kind of leadership as referring “to those principals who engage with their teaching staff in ways that inspire them to new levels of energy, commitment and moral purpose such that they work collaboratively to overcome challenges and reach ambitious goals” (Hattie 2009:83).

This model of leadership is not without critics: it has been described as “the top dog theory of school leadership, the model of one leader, one school which is not about transformation but about domination” (Gunter 2001:72). She claims that this has became the ‘globalised model’ of leadership because it fitted the restructuring agenda of New Labour but ignored completely models such as the Chinese leadership perspective with its emphasis on group leadership. The positive behaviours associated with transformational leadership have included “building school vision; establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support, modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood and Jantzi 2005:674).

‘Instructional’ and ‘transformational’ may have become two of the most commonly used terms associated with leadership behaviours that collectively affect student outcomes but there are many other taxonomies in the so called

"domain of leadership knowledge" (Anonakis et al 2004:3). These adjectival iterations preferred by researchers to identify particular behavioural approaches have been described as theoretical *perspectives* or leadership *orientations* (Bush 1995, Leithwood and Jantzi 1999,) but their range is extensive. They include those which emphasise behaviours in a moral dimension such as '*sustainable*' (Hargreaves and Fink 2004), '*moral*' (Sergiovanni 1992, Fullan 2003), '*soulful*' (Bolman 1996), '*ethical*' (Begley 2003, Strike 2007), and '*democratic*' (Macbeath and Moos 2004); those which emphasise behaviours promoting a particular mode of management organisation, although with ethical democratic underpinning such as '*distributed*' (Harris 2008, West Burnham 2009), or '*situational*' and '*contextual*' (Leithwood et al 1999, Southworth 2004) and still more describe the effective competencies or behaviours that successful principals develop and use (Macbeath and Myers, 1999, Northouse 2009). Many more prescribe and identify qualities and traits that 'effective' leaders exhibit (Stodgill 1974, Day 2004) and others feature behaviours that principals do well in 'good' schools (Gray and Streshly 2008).

This diversity of description of leadership behaviours illustrates well Gunter's observation that "the leadership in education terrain is very busy" (Gunter 2001:2). This often confusing multitude of varying perspectives and theoretical frameworks has been described as "conceptual pluracy" (Bolman and Deal 1997) and there are problems with this for researchers attempting to align empirical findings. From the field of organisational leadership Yukl highlights the ontological difficulties of grouping together behaviours into leadership taxonomies:

"behaviour categories are abstractions rather than tangible attributes of the real world. The categories are derived from observed behaviour in order to organise perceptions of the world and make them meaningful, but they do not exist in any objective sense" (Yukl 2002:61).

More pragmatically successful leadership appears to be dependent on the ability to bring the right behaviours to the forefront of day to day practice, at the right time, and recent research seems to be recognising much more the complexity and nuanced nature of successful school leadership. This is evident in two of the claims distilled from the recent review of latest research and earlier empirical

research as part of the DFE/ NCSL, three year study (Day et al 2010:8). These claims are “that successful heads use the same basic leadership practices but there is no single model for achieving success” (Claim 4) and “heads contribute to student learning and achievement through a combination and accumulation of strategies and actions” (Claim 6) (ibid: 10). The research concluded that:

“the new evidence in our study is that successful heads draw equally on elements of both instructional and transformational leadership. They work intuitively and from experience, tailoring their leadership strategies to their particular school context” (ibid: 8).

Significantly, the findings of this UK study go on to suggest that there is clear empirical evidence that it is not the leadership practices *themselves* which seem to make a difference but *the way* that each leader applies those practices in a sensitive manner and with recognition of the context:

“the success of leadership practices is dependent on leaders’ values and interpersonal qualities and that these in turn are affected by their professional and organisational context.” (ibid: 9).

Furthermore, and of even greater relevance to this study about the principal’s leadership of students is the conclusion that:

“the research demonstrates that heads in more effective schools are successful in improving pupil outcomes through who they are - their values, virtues, dispositions, attributes and competences - the strategies they use, and the specific combination and timely implementation and management of these strategies in response to the unique contexts in which they work” (Leithwood et al 2010:15).

It is this assertion, which identifies leadership behaviours in the affective dimension, those practices which affect the way students feel, which seems to illuminate most usefully, those leadership behaviours most relevant to the investigation of a leader’s relationship with students.

2.3.5. Relational Leadership

Relationally oriented leadership has been described as “being attuned to and in touch with the intricate web of inter and intra relationships that influence an organisation” (Harris 2008:34) and the behaviours associated with it as being “concerned primarily with establishing and maintaining cooperative relationships characterised by high levels of mutual trust and loyalty” (Yukl 2002:424).

Another description of leadership in this dimension refers to it as “interpersonal leadership” (Leithwood and Riehl 2005). According to the authors this “involves a process of self-awareness leading to successful engagement with school stakeholders” and “stresses the importance of collaboration and interpersonal relationships” (*ibid*).

Others too have noted the significance of the relations formed by school leaders. For instance, Hargreaves was able to propose that “the school leadership paradigm which emerges from our study emphasises the capability of the school leader to sustain relationships...and puts the heart and emotions of teaching at the centre” (Hargreaves 1997 in Macbeath 1998:147). And, in a recent study by Kouzes and Posner (2007) the importance of relational leadership was highlighted above all other variables of organisational leadership effectiveness:

"there's still another crucial truth about leadership. It's something that we've known for a long time, but we've come to prize even more today. In talking to leaders and reading their cases, there was a very clear message that wove itself throughout every situation and action. The message was: leadership is a relationship. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It's the quality of this relationship that matters most when we're engaged in getting extraordinary things done" (Kouzes and Posner 2007:24).

The theoretical understanding of the linkage between *school conditions*, which includes emotional climate of the school brought about by the quality of relationships and student achievement, comes from a psychological perspective. In particular, from the social cognitive orientation of motivation theory it is assumed that individuals (students) have psychological needs, especially that of a feeling of belonging to a community, and that the satisfaction (or not) of these needs affects behaviour; the school or any social context can significantly shape and influence how well these needs are met (Osterman 2000).

Significantly, research which focuses on the effect of student emotional well-being is able to demonstrate an association between an organisational climate which meets students' emotional needs of relatedness, and improved student outcomes (Osterman 2000, Bryk and Schneider 2002, Goddard 2003, Tschanen-Moran 2004). In describing an emotionally positive climate as a one in which trust features prominently, Osterman (2000) explains the consequences of both positive and negative emotional experiences for students:

"to experience relatedness, students must feel that they are worthy of respect and that the others in their group or social context care for them. Their beliefs about themselves develop through their interactions. If interactions are positive and affirming, students will have a stronger sense of relatedness. This in turn reinforces and encourages similar behaviour. On the contrary, if experiences are negative, if students receive information that they are not valued and that their behaviour is unwelcome or rejected, they are less likely to initiate prosocial behaviors, adopting instead patterns of withdrawal or aggression. The students' experience in the classroom, then shapes self- perceptions and behaviour" (Osterman 2000: 351)

Goddard (2003) too, emphasises the power of relational trust on the outcomes for elementary school students in the US using the theoretical framework developed by Coleman (1990). In this perspective strong relationships are described as a form of social capital and as such "can have positive effects because they constitute a form of social capital that is of value to children's academic success." (Goddard 2003: 59) Other principal effects research has identified trust as an important variable, and in this, the role of principal leadership "has been highlighted in recent evidence as a critical contributor to trust among teachers, parents and students" (Leithwood et al 2010: 20). This construct of social capital identified by Goddard may point to a significant analytical approach which may help make sense of the data emerging from this study from the voice of students. The research field and broader literature of social capital is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 and its usefulness as a conceptual construct emerging from the qualities of social relationships, such as Trust, is explored further.

2.3.6. Emotional leadership

Closely related to the literature on relational leadership is that described here as emotional leadership. Much of this research, such as Blasé (1987), Atkinson (2000), Blasé (2001) has shown the positive effect on student outcomes that occurs when teachers feel positive about the organisation. The findings suggest that the behaviours of school leaders have an effect on the way teachers feel about themselves which gets communicated to students and which, in turn, affects the way that students perceive the organisation and their attitude to learning. West Burnham points to the observations by Caine and Caine (1997) that links this positive self concept engendered through good relationships, to its influence on the ability to learn (Caine and Caine 1997: 104 in West Burnham 2009: 70-71).

This idea that leaders affect the emotions of others finds support in the field of cognitive leadership research. As Goleman comments, "quite simply, in any human group the leader has maximal power to sway everyone's emotions" (Goleman 2002: 5). The suggestion that leadership is a process of influence over others is a useful and generally accepted theoretical position within organisational leadership research. Yukl suggests that "influence is the essence of leadership" and comments that "much of the activity of formal leaders involves attempts to influence the attitudes and behaviour of people, including subordinates, peers, superiors and outsiders" (Yukl 2002:426). Furthermore he highlights the intentionality and the personal nature of the influence:

"intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization"(ibid).

This influence process, the relationship between leader and led, is seen by others as a two way process. Antonakis observes that "we conceptualise leadership as a social process, one involving both a leader and a follower" (Antonakis 2004:125). The *followership* characteristic of leadership is also emphasised by Lord and Brown (2004).

"we focus on followers as the direct determinant of leadership effects because it is generally through followers' reactions and

behaviours that leadership attempts succeed or fail" (Lord and Brown, 2004: x).

Grint goes further and suggests that if it is the case that all leadership phenomena are constructivist in nature then "leaders must spend some of their time constructing not just followers, but a community of followers" (Grint 2000:4).

In terms of the operative cognitive process, research evidence suggests that a positive, direct, personal relationship with the leader has an effect on followers' self identity or self concept. It is suggested that the information processing that is carried out by the led enables leaders to transform the manner in which the led conceptualise themselves (Paul et al 2001). Antonakis (2004) is clear that "leaders have a direct effect on the working self concept of followers." (Antonakis: 146), whilst Lord and Brown (2004) confirm that "many powerful forms of leadership are thought to influence the identity of followers" (Lord and Brown 2004: xi). However, whilst the suggestion that leadership can be conceptualised as followership and that it is carried out through a process of influence is generally accepted, it has only recently been more widely accepted that the influence is affective and that it is largely the emotions that are being influenced and doing the influencing. Leadership has more often been conceptualised as a rational process; usually the view that the transactional nature of the process, whereby leaders influence the led to believe it is in their interest to be led, has predominated. This new conceptualisation of the *reciprocal*, emotional, relationship, influence process between leader and led is well captured by Foster:

"history has been written in ways that present progress and grand events as the product of individual agency when the reality is a conjunction of ideas where leadership is shared and transferred between leadership and followers, each only a temporary designation. In this way leadership is commonplace and happens locally and inevitably. It assumes that there is a human and political relationship between teacher and pupils" (Foster 1989:49 in Gunter 2001: 38).

So there is evidence that suggests that leaders can positively affect the behaviour of others by influencing their emotional state. In proposing a new

paradigm for leadership, *Primal Leadership*, Goleman asserts that "great leadership works through the emotions" (Goleman 2002: 56) and later that the "fundamental task of leaders" is to "prime good feeling in those they lead. That occurs when a leader creates resonance - a reservoir of positivity that frees the best in people. At its root then, the primal job of leadership is emotional" (Goleman et al 2002: xi). Yukl too makes a powerful claim for the emotional dimension of leadership when suggesting that it is "only (my emphasis) the emotional, value based aspects of leadership influence (that) can account for the exceptional achievement of groups and organisations (Yukl, 2002: 7).

2.3.7. Leaders' Traits

But what is required of leaders in order to be able to influence the emotions of others? Brent Davies describes leaders who "deepen the emotional understanding of everyone they encounter" but who in order to do this need to understand that "the links between who we are and how we lead teach and learn are critical to success in schools" (Davies 2009:5). His idea that "leadership begins and ends with the self" (*ibid*: 2) is similar to the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) proposed by Goleman (1995). This concept based on earlier work by Salovey and Mayer (1990) describes the qualities associated with EI as self awareness, self confidence, self control, self regulation, self motivation, and empathy. Similar qualities are listed by Northouse who describes them as those "people skills - those abilities that help a leader to work effectively with subordinates, peers, and superiors to accomplish the organization's goals" (Northouse 2009: 69). However, research has yet to find direct evidence suggesting a co relation between these qualities in leaders and the leader's effectiveness. It seems likely from a common sense perspective, that the personality and characteristics of school leaders would contribute to the quality of the relationships they form, and this thesis, that personal qualities have a prominent determinant role in effective leadership bears similarities to the leadership theory known as Trait Theory.

This was first proposed in the early 20th Century by Hill, who sought to identify the traits or characteristics possessed by great leaders (Hill 1928) and has gone in and out of fashion ever since. It was discredited in the eyes of some as it is associated with the notion of ‘heroic leadership’, the suggestion that leaders are born that way, making leadership the preserve of a precious few special humans and that leadership is dependent on inherited traits or characteristics. However, empirical research failed to detect any evidence that these personality traits could guarantee leadership success: the model was flawed; the processes and successful behaviours were hidden inside the ‘black box’. Whilst this paradigm has properly been criticised (Southworth 2004) the importance of the personal qualities still emerges as a significant factor in school (Bush 2008, West Burnham 2009, Day et al 2009 Leithwood et al 2010) and organisational leadership research (Tuohy and Coghlan 1997).

Yukl describes traits as “aspects of personality, temperament, needs, motives, and values.” (Yukl 2002: 17) They could include “confidence, extroversion, emotional maturity and energy levels” (*ibid*), but also “intelligence, attention to the needs of others, understanding of the task, initiative and persistence, self confidence and extraordinary abilities such as tireless energy, penetrating intuition, uncanny foresight, and irresistible persuasive powers” (Stodgill 1974). These qualities seem perfectly fitted to the role of school leaders in a job that requires an ethical and passionate commitment (Day 2004); it may be that the effect of such traits is more on the emergence of leadership and its sustainability as Yukl indicates:

“traits affect a person’s willingness and ability to assume leadership responsibilities and tolerate the stress and relentless pressure of the job. Traits also help to determine a leader’s desire to accumulate power, influence people, develop leadership skills, and understand and learn from feedback” (Yukl 2002: 427).

2.4 A Critical Commentary

Despite being contained within the broad research area of principal effectiveness, the reader may feel that the fields of literature reviewed for this study are rather eclectic and may even critically suggest that they are overly personalised and leave out other key areas. For instance, principal

effectiveness studies can be linked closely to the research on the effectiveness of teachers, or feature change management as a central focus. However, this idiographic study reflects the researcher's personal context as a school leader and all the historical and contingent events that have shaped his construction of principal leadership.

With this in mind the reader may clearly understand that the field of principal effectiveness should feature centrally in a study about a principal's leadership, but be less clear that the school effectiveness literature should have such a prominent position. But in this personalised study, an examination of the research that featured not only the effectiveness of school principals but also, at a more fundamental level, the effectiveness of schools that principals lead, lies at the heart of the researcher's professional identity and as such it was felt to be a key focus area. Both principal effectiveness and school effectiveness research literature were examined in a search for the clues that might throw light on both the behaviours and contexts of successful school leadership, which may in turn illuminate the concept of student leadership. As such, a theoretical understanding of principal and school leadership also was an important area to examine. From these areas clues emerged which suggested that personal relationships with the whole community of school members including teachers, parents and students mattered, and the literature examining the role that relationships and emotions play in leadership success, offered the perspectives backed up by empirical experience of school leadership, that seemed to be the most fruitful to pursue.

In summary then, this journey of exploration of literature, in an attempt to illuminate the concept of student leadership, has made evident salient issues in relation to my research questions. The issues that emerge to be set alongside the student data are *students'* conceptualisations of leadership that see it as operating at varying levels within schools; the extent of the mediated nature of school leadership; the descriptions of leader behaviours and the affective nature of leadership characteristics on feelings and emotions. These are key areas of relevance to recognise when considering the empirical student data in the following chapters and together these issues form a framework for the

further enquiry into the nature of my leadership of students in the later discussion of findings in Chapter 7.

Chapter 3

Methodology

How far is truth susceptible of embodiment? - that is the question, that is the experiment.

(Nietzsche)

3.1 Introduction

The methodological approach of a research project has been described as ‘the science of the investigation’ (Pinker 2011). This is the sum of the techniques, methods and approaches chosen when collecting and analysing the research data; the practical and philosophical assumptions behind the approach and an exposition of the problems and ethical issues encountered during the course of the project. The aim of the chapter is to provide a rationale for the methodological approach taken, in order to demonstrate to the reader, that the chosen methodologies are the best possible to answer these idiosyncratic research questions. The chapter will show that these methods have attempted to collect and analyse useful data into meaningful chunks of information and allow the research to provide further insight into what makes an effective school principal.

If it is true as Crotty suggests, that “as researchers, we have to devise for ourselves a research process that serves our purposes best, one that helps us more than any other to answer our research question” (Crotty 1998:216), then it is important at the outset to define the purpose of the investigation. And for this project this purpose is both exploratory and illuminatory: its aim is to explore and to illuminate the phenomenon of a principal’s leadership of students with neither nomothetic or inductive, nor experimental or deductive intent. It is a very personal, idiographic study and as such has required the design of a singular research process.

One measure of the strength of the research design and its efficacy will be the consistency of the methodological thread connecting each element of the

process. It has been suggested that this consistency “needs to be apparent in the choice of research paradigm, between the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher and the methods of data collection and its analysis, in order to answer the questions being asked” (Wellington et al 2005:96). In this way, credibility to “any findings, conclusions and claims” (*ibid*), can be assured. With this in mind the chapter is structured in order to help the reader trace this consistent approach between the elements of its design and explain and substantiate the choices made. These include:

- the choice of an interpretivist research paradigm and the philosophical assumptions underpinning this choice;
- the analytical framing within socio cultural activity theory and social capital perspectives;
- the adoption of a Case Study approach;
- the decision to research from inside the Case;
- the collection of qualitative data to answer the questions;
- the choice of Focus Groups method to generate the data;
- the use of CAQDAS methodology to create meaning and aid analysis of the data; and
- the ethical considerations and problematic issues arising in the research.

3.2. The Research Paradigm

Mackenzie and Knipe insist that making clear, both to the researcher’s audience and to the researcher himself, the paradigm in which the research sits, is an essential first step in the research process. For, they suggest:

“it is the choice of paradigm that sets down the intent, motivation and expectations for the research. Without nominating a paradigm as the first step, there is no basis for subsequent choices regarding methodology, methods, literature, or research design” (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006:193).

This seems to be a reasonable suggestion to make given that the essential purpose of research is to contribute to knowledge in the research field. This claim for knowledge is a significant assertion and carries with it important responsibilities: by doing so the researcher is claiming authority, validity and truth for the findings, a claim that what is being presented represents an

accurate interpretation of the participants' views. It is in order to enable others to effectively examine, challenge and substantiate such knowledge claims that an exposition and explanation of the researcher's own conceptual understanding of the nature of social reality is essential.

Guba and Lincoln describe the research paradigm as a means of getting at the truth which best suits the project you are involved with, and propose 7 paradigmatic settings which are most commonly utilised by social science researchers (Guba and Lincoln 1981: 53ff). But for this very idiographic project, with its clear purpose of exploration of a social phenomenon, which itself is constructed through relationships and emotions between an adult and children, the perspective which seems best suited is that described by them as the naturalistic paradigm. Research in this paradigm seeks *understanding*, 'verstehen' rather than definitive answers. It is not reductionist, seeking to create meaning by breaking down phenomena into definitive variables, but looks for the patterns in human interactions that construct meaning for individuals. It is from this perspective that the day to day activities, connections, exchanges, thoughts, functions and interactions, both direct and indirect, between a school principal and his students, can best be explored.

This explanation of the way humans make sense of the world has been called the 'constructivist/interpretivist' perspective (Schwandt 1994). These approaches to research have the intention of understanding "the world of human experience" (Cohen & Manion 2000:36), and suggest that "reality is *socially constructed*" (*my italics*) (Mertens 1998:12). Researchers with this understanding of the way social meaning is created tend to rely upon the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell 2002:8). But In adopting this interpretivist/constructivist approach, this project is not typical of research in the field of leadership or educational leadership research. Antonakis et al observe that "leadership research traditionally has been dominated by a positivist, quantitative epistemological orientation that places the emphasis on ideals such as objectivity, neutrality, procedure, technique, quantification, replicability, generalisation, and discovery of laws." (Antonakis et

al 2004:81). And there may be good reasons for the preponderance of quantitative studies in the field. A review of 70 qualitative studies found that in comparison with a similarly large number of quantitative studies they were “less likely to build on previous knowledge and had weaker external validity” Bryman (2004). It was noted that these were able to illuminate the role of leadership in bringing about organisational change but they were judged less successful in their overall contribution to the research field.

There are continuing debates about the kind of research that will lead to what has been called the pursuit of “fundamental knowledge” about leadership (Gunter and Robbins 2003:234). In her editorial section of a special edition of *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* dedicated to educational leadership research methodologies, Lumby suggests that “leadership is so critical within education, and such a complex and contested activity, that it demands consideration specifically of methodologies which will adequately facilitate its exploration.”(Lumby 2005: 136). She argues that a greater focus on appropriate methodologies is required and these must be predicated on the pragmatic acceptance of our ability to combine methods in a judicious way, and the rejection of wasteful ‘paradigmatic’ strife. Furthermore, she suggests that as researchers we must accept “the vital role of subjective judgement in all our analyses and the lack of certainty in our conclusions.” (ibid:162) and concludes that targeted research of a subjective nature “could transform the knowledge base for educational leadership and management.”

However, the positivist approach, more familiar to much educational research was not adopted for this project for reasons of over complexity or fallibility, but simply that the assumptions and methods of that paradigm were considered “simply not amenable to the study of certain educational phenomena” (Candy 1989). Naturalistic methodologies and the collection of qualitative rather than quantitative data have been used for this study because they suit its aim of finding out the ‘why and how’ of a principal’s student leadership and not the ‘what’. The aim of this research is “to gather in depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour “(Garrick 1999:149), and to document “observations in ways that are at one time conceptually informative, professionally useful and ideologically productive” (Freebody 2003:

xi). In short, the phenomenon being investigated is of a qualitative nature and may best be researched using these methodologies.

3.3. Issues Arising from the Reporting of Qualitative Data

Research within a qualitative paradigm requires utmost vigilance and transparency on the part of the researcher to ensure that the sense that is made of the participant data, and the meaning that is given to it, can be said to be trustworthy and to have credibility. The problem with making sense of qualitative data is largely epistemological; it centres on the extent to which an investigator can see through other people's eyes and interpret events from their point of view. Bryman (1988: 72) calls this the *Problem of Interpretation*. In order to ensure that the knowledge generated is credible, or 'trustworthy' (Guba and Lincoln 1989) it has been suggested that researchers need to take the perspective of the humans being researched by "penetrating their force of meaning" (Ritchie and Lewis 2003:5).

To achieve this, research in this paradigm needs to make the position of the researcher absolutely clear at the start of the project so that the reader is fully aware of his position and possible biases. These may be prominent or less visible and be present as a result of orientation, context of history, or personal and professional experience. It is for this reason that I have stated my position in the introduction. There it can be seen that my interests and values are clearly expressed in order to enable the reader to understand, as far as possible, where I am coming from.

Having made the reader aware of the researcher's position it is then important for the researcher to make attempts at all stages of the research process to take these biases into account. From my positioning statement the reader will be aware of my role as school principal, my interest in schools needing improvement, my working class background and a moral perspective of equality and social justice. Each of these factors will have a strong influence on my choice of research topic, research questions, analysis of data and conclusions drawn from the study, which may be problematic when assessing the reliability

of the study. However, to minimise the risk of such researcher bias compromising the study, several layers of control have operated in this study.

The first is my own self knowledge and the critical application of that to the research process. I consider myself to be a critically reflective practitioner and at various stages of my career have demonstrated and have been recognised in this way. These include assessments at NPQH and LPSH as well as a previous Masters' level study. As such, I have always felt very aware of my context and its potential for bias and consequently thought in depth and critically about the research focus and the research design for this study. As a consequence, the use of a sympathetic and collaborative co researcher has provided a strong second layer of control. Frequent discussion with Luke, firstly about the formation of questions, and then about the themes that were appearing in the data, proved to be an invaluable tool for triangulating meaning. Alongside this, discussion with my supervisor about the meaning of themes, on one occasion with Luke present, also presented opportunities for further confirmation or rethinking the meaning of participant data. A third level of triangulation was the coding process, especially the opportunities presented for constant comparison with similar pieces of text from many students that analysis with Nvivo presented. The advantages of the utilisation of this CAQDAS software in the coding process is described more fully below, but essentially, the assignment of every chunk of text to a code with repeated checking, and consolidation, followed by either rejection or confirmation of meaning, ensured a high level of scrutiny of the validity of meaning. In these ways, I believe that my self –intentioned and self aware critical approach, especially at the analytical stage, has helped account for issues of bias and prejudice.

Another issue that can be problematic when reporting qualitative data is that of validity (Bryman 1988 and Gray 2009). This concerns the extent to which the findings are valid beyond the immediate study; in other words the extent to which the findings are generalisable to other cases or contexts. However, the issue of generalisability arises when claims for the findings move beyond the intentional aims of the study. For instance, this study seeks only to explore and pursue a very idiographic phenomenon, which is located within a single context,

the student leadership of one principal with 35 student participants, and lays no claim of generalisability to other contexts. Nevertheless, although this case study is illuminative and seeks to understand through an analytical generalisation of specific qualitative data, rather than a larger scale statistical analysis, this specific interrogation of my context does hold out the future promise of sharing good practice with fellow professionals.

3.4. The Analytical Perspective

3.4.1 Socio Cultural Activity Theory

In order to understand the qualitative data from students and to help create meaning from it, an analytical theoretical framework was adopted which was consistent with the epistemological perspective of the methodology. This framing is from a socio cultural perspective and its theoretical application socio cultural activity theory. This fits the adoption of a constructionist perspective for the thesis and makes the assumption that phenomena such as student leadership are subjective, but that they can be viewed from an objective position. This analysis sits alongside the thematic analytical approach which was undertaken to provide the basic structure for ordering the data.

Socio cultural frameworks have become increasingly prevalent in social science research over the last 30 years and stem from the work of Russian psychologist Vygotsky. The perspective emerged from his work on the development of elements of the human psyche, such as memory and consciousness, and the human process of learning. He used the term socio historical rather than social cultural but the essence of this perspective, its key feature, is the observation that meaning and learning are culturally or socially situated. This understanding is well captured by Ratner who describes how

“People collectively construct concepts that objectify their understanding of things (objects, animals, and humans). These cultural concepts enable people to communicate about things. Cultural concepts also organise the manner in which people perceive, imagine, think about, remember, and feel about things. In other words, collectively constructed concepts compose culture, and cultural symbols organise psychological phenomena.” (Ratner 1997: 93).

The implications for this study are that observations about the principal's student leadership from participant students will be shaped by the cultural context of the school and the individual histories between the principal and students. The aim of such a contextual, constructionist approach framed in a socio cultural perspective, has been described as "to explicate the relationships between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional and historical situations in which this functioning occurs, on the other" (Wertsch 1995:3).

Using Vygotsky's theorisation as a basis for understanding, other Russian psychologists, such as Leontiev and Luria, emphasised the intermediary function of *actions* in human meaning making. These works and theoretical framework of these contemporary scholars are well detailed elsewhere, for instance, Kozulin (1996), but essentially they highlighted the role of activity in the formation of consciousness and understanding, in contrast to previous and later mind/ body distinctions, that viewed the psyche as given and present. In what most academics in the field would now describe as a third generation of development taken on by European scholars such as Engestrom, for example, Engestrom and Miettinen (1999) and Daniels (2005) in the UK, this theoretical analytical approach has become known as activity theory. This framework of analysis which includes the definitions of activity systems, such as schools, and the mediating factors which affect human activity and which can be intentionally manipulated and used as *tools for change*, has been used as a framing perspective for making meaning.

Activity theory is not without its critics. A main criticism is that it can appear to be a constraint to interpretation and analysis with its need to fit an overly rigid framing. A school in such an analytical setting would be viewed as an activity system, with its socio cultural norms dependent on its immediate and wider context and history, and established for its members of students, teachers, parents through mediational tools such as curriculum, pedagogy, instructional organization, including timetabling and organization of the school day (Daniels 2005). For this study these definitions and breadth of cultural or historical perspectives from many actors, proved to be beyond its scope and in light of

this, activity theory was not used as an analytical tool. Its value for this study lay in the emphasis it gives to the analysis of the data from the socio cultural perspective and in particular the significance of social capital.

3.4.2. Social Capital

A further development in socio cultural analysis has been the acknowledgement of the social and cultural impact that schools can make on students. For instance, the sociological construct known as ‘social capital’ has clearly become influential in policy making circles, as evidenced by the Office for National Statistics (2001) review of the literature on social capital. More specifically, Munn (2000) discusses social capital, schools, and exclusions and explores the usefulness of the concept of social capital in relation to understanding school practices, particularly those aimed at tackling social exclusion. He concludes that social capital is a “helpful analytical tool for considering the underachievement of disadvantaged children, in promoting social control, and in examining school practices in personal and social development” (Munn 2000: 169).

The term ‘social capital’ is a way of defining the intangible resources of community, shared values and trust upon which we all draw in daily life according to Field . He suggests that ‘the theory of social capital is, at heart, most straightforward. Its central thesis can be summed up in two words: “relationships matter” (Field 2008:1). The main theorists of social capital have been listed by Field as Bourdieu (1986); Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1995, 2000). However, space does not permit a full critical consideration of the theories of these scholars, but a brief summary of their definitions of social capital will serve to highlight the significant features and point to its relevance to the analysis and understanding of this project.

For instance, Putnam who has probably done most to popularise the term describes social capital as the “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995: 67). Coleman elaborates more fully, suggesting

that “social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman 1990: 302). Finally Bourdieu’s definition has echoes of both, explaining that social capital is ‘the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition’ (Bourdieu 1986: 248).

Following Putnam’s description of the decline of social connectedness in post 1950s America (Putnam 2000), the concept of social capital has been widely adopted by UK policy makers as an explanation for the perceived reduction in social cohesion and community values. In a variety of political areas such as economic growth, health, crime, government efficiency and education, the impact of social capital has become a key area of discussion, for example Halpern (2005). Most pertinent to this study, however, is its applicability to educational contexts. For example, Field states that “we can conclude, with some confidence, that there is a close relationship between people’s social networks and their educational performance” (Field 2008:55), whilst Munn (2000: 172) argues that social capital as a concept is a “useful analytical tool in understanding school practices”, with Halpern (2005: 166) concluding that social capital “at the micro-, meso- and macro-levels has a significant impact on educational outcomes”.

3.5. Case Study

The methodological approach utilised for this investigation is Case Study. This is consistent with the socio cultural perspective described above and is recognised as a useful approach for some social science research. It has been used widely in qualitative educational research for example Bassey (1999) and Cohen and Mannion (2000); however, there are fewer examples of Case Study methodology being utilised in the field of principal effects, but there are some, for example, Scheurich (1998) and Atkinson (2000). Case study has proved to

be a useful approach especially when the spotlight of research has needed to be narrowed and focused. Its effectiveness is based on the idea that "sometimes, in depth knowledge of an individual example is more helpful than fleeting knowledge about a larger number of examples. We gain better understanding of the whole by focusing on a part" (Geering 2007:1).

In Case Study, persons or aspects of practice studied, are examined in depth: researchers are encouraged to include their own personal perspectives in the interpretation, with their role as researcher being given greater critical attention. The possibility of the researcher taking a neutral or more transcendental position is recognised as problematic, but researchers are encouraged to be aware of their role and to be very explicit about the ethics, the stance and beliefs they hold. The way the case and the researcher interact is presumed unique and not necessarily reproducible for other cases and researchers. Generalisable theories are neither expected nor induced from the knowledge created; similarly knowledge deduced from existing theory is never the recognisable starting point for the research journey. The value of the research knowledge from Case Study is seen in other ways:

"the quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader, are valued. Thus, a personal valuing of the work is expected" (Stake 1995:135).

These descriptions of the approach suit the interpretive stance and exploratory purpose of this investigation and other features are equally apposite to this research project; in particular its attempt to capture the *everyday*, naturalistic interchanges between principal and students. Freebody describes this characteristic of Case Study methodology as "the story of a naturalistic experiment-in-action, the routine moves education and learners make in a clearly known and readily defended discursive, conceptual and professional space (the case) (Freebody 2003:83). Yin (2003) emphasises the contribution a case study approach can make to knowledge of individuals in very personal studies, as well as organisations and social phenomena, whilst Stake (1995) highlights its utility in understanding "the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake 1995:xi).

3.6. Research from the Inside

Case Study research in education is usually at the level of the institution rather than that of an individual. However, the case in question for this investigation, this ‘bounded study’ is the researcher himself: the principal, whose leadership of students is being investigated. This poses interesting methodological issues which are raised in the course of this section. In this case study, the researcher is as close to the object of research as it is possible to be. This is not research from the wings but is located firmly on the inside. The problem here is that from this position it may be difficult to make any objective knowledge claim, because the presence of the researcher, with his own perspective and interpretation of what he is being told, will affect the validity of the interpretation. Griffiths highlights this dilemma for a qualitative researcher: he describes research in this paradigm as a “journey in which we need to pick our way” at the same time, “paying attention as we go to how we change the landscape by inhabiting it” (Griffiths 1998:79). Blackburn too highlights our fallibility as humans, let alone researching humans, when attempting to be objective and stand aside from our own participation in the world: he observes that “we are quite good instruments for registering truth and dismissing falsehood. But we are not as good as we like to believe, and we are often not very good at all” (Blackburn 1999:182).

Whilst these descriptions apply to any researcher involved in observational or participant, qualitative research, for the insider researcher they are especially apposite. It is true “there is a continuum of involvement in this...from complete immersion in the programme as full participant, to complete separation from the activities observed, taking on the role of a spectator” (Genzuk 2003 :3). But even in this research setting where the researcher is not spectating but participating fully, it is possible for the problem of objectivity to be addressed. In fact, in such an idiographic study as this, underpinned by a constructivist world view, it may be that the best place to collect the uniqueness of the participants’ experience will be from the inside and the best instrument of collection will be the practising researcher.

Practitioner research, “which brings the researcher into the frame” (West Burnham 2007) has a strongly supported history in educational research. From an Action Research perspective, McNiff et al highlight the benefits for real knowledge discovery when the researcher is part of the process of being investigated:

“the main focus of your research is you. You are not aiming to show a cause and effect between you and others in the sense of ‘if I do X, then Y will happen,’ but you are aiming to show an improvement of your practice” (McNiff, McNamara and Leonard 2000:39).

This description sits comfortably with the nature of this investigation although it does not adopt Action Research methods. In describing the exploratory purpose of practitioner research it confirms that objective claims about knowledge can be reached with awareness and mindfulness on the part of the practitioner researcher. Brookfield again makes us aware of the importance for researchers to identify the assumptions they hold. He describes these as “the taken for granted beliefs about the world and our place within it that seem so obvious to us as not to need explaining” (Brookfield 1995:2). He suggests that it is these assumptions that lead us to operate within paradigmatic frameworks of subconscious thought patterns, but points out our reluctance to identify these patterns:

“becoming aware of the implicit assumptions that frame how we think and act is one of the most challenging intellectual puzzles we face in our lives. It is also one we instinctively resist for fear of what we might discover”(Brookfield 1995:5).

Wellington et al also challenge our capacity to identify these assumptions in our normal lives, “we have to be aware of the assumptions we have...It is rare for people untrained in science deliberately to attempt to refute their own hypothesis: instead we tend to reinterpret anything that happens to fit in with the notion to which we have become increasingly committed.” (Wellington et al 2007:102). Groundwater Smith describes this self knowledge as recognizing our ‘second record.’ For her it is the “constellation of subjectivities that are held by the researcher at the time of collection, analyzing and interpreting information, and that cannot fail to influence the work.” (Groundwater Smith 2005: 330).

This is the knowledge that Hexter describes as “each man’s...knowledge of himself that he uses to steer himself through the daily dilemmas and difficulties of living” (Hexter 1972 in Groundwater Smith 2005:330).

But research from the inside can be seen to carry real power: so much that it has been suggested that, “researchers who adopt this view draw on a new epistemology of insiderness that see life and work as intertwined” (Reinharz 1992:260). In this research project, the insider position carries strength because the researcher brings detailed and powerful contextual insider knowledge and motivation. This researching of principal’s student leadership, this experience of mine and theirs, which is so close and so bound up with the everyday life of the school and its myriad of opportunities and complications, seems to some extent, only to be researchable from the inside. The ‘new epistemology’ described above seems to be the essence of this kind of doctoral research study: professionally centred, personally developmental, and at once both transcendental and formative.

3.7. Research Design

For this project the evolution of the final design became part of the research process itself, and emerged after much consideration and reflection supporting the view that “selection of methodologies and methods is very much a reflective, philosophical endeavour rather than the technical business that it is sometimes presented as being” (Wellington et al 2005:96). Neither was the process “neat, linear, coherent or straightforward” (*ibid*), but “a highly complex process that requires constant reflection, amendment, adjustment and refinement if it is to succeed” (Burgess et al 2006: 65).

The process of designing an effective process for this project would certainly support this assertion made by Guba and Lincoln:

“within the naturalistic paradigm a design can be specified only incompletely in advance. To specify it in detail would be to place constraints on the inquiry that are antithetical to the

stance and purpose of the naturalist. The design emerges as the investigation proceeds; moreover, it is in constant flux as new information is gained and new insights are achieved"(Guba and Lincoln 1982: 73).

The design was not rigidly established at the outset and several ideas and plans were followed at the initial stage which resulted in data that was collected, which in the end was not deemed suitable for analysis in the written thesis. There was a clear objective of the design however; this was to capture the essence of a principal's student leadership and in order to detect this undefined phenomenon, some very creative ideas were trialled. One of these, for instance, was the use of pictorial data: this involved giving selected students cameras to record where they saw the principal's student leadership taking place. Another method trialled was for the principal to record in detailed written notes, any incident where he felt his leadership of students taking place: this too was backed up with a large flip chart in his office being the 'rough and dirty' receptacle of many a scribbled account of different incidents. However, this method proved to be impractical and unsustainable for a practising principal caught up in the hurly burly of day to day school life.

However, for this project, given its idiographic nature, asking students about their experience of the principal's leadership of them presented itself as the main and most fruitful approach to enable the collection of analysable data from which meaning could be created. But this approach required careful methodological considerations at the outset, and the process reshaped and altered during the course of the investigation. In particular there were five features of design of the methodological approach that require further discussion and explanation. These include:

- the use and identity of a co researcher;
- the use of focus groups to collect the data;
- the selection of focus group participants;
- the process of constructing the discussion prompts;
- the process of thematic coding and use of CAQDAS methods in analysis.

3.7.1. Use of a Co Researcher

For this project there is an immediate and significant difficulty to overcome regarding the means adopted to collect the data. Normally the identity of the data collector would not be a matter for significant consideration: the researcher would also be the instrument of data collection. In this case, however, there would be serious ethical concerns raised of students being at risk if asked by the principal of their view of his leadership of them. This effectively rules out the researcher as data collector. The solution employed was to utilise a co researcher, but in order to avoid the same issues of coercion and power implicit in the relationships between principal and students, the identity of the co researcher needed to be carefully considered.

The person selected had to be someone possessing intellectual competence enough to follow through the whole process, from participating in writing the focus group prompts, to transcribing recordings of the groups; someone emotionally intelligent and skilled in encouraging in depth discussion with students, whilst commanding respect enough to keep students focused in the right area; someone who understood the concept of principal/ student leadership and someone who was known to the students and to whom they would respond to in an unguarded and unsuspicious way. A desirable criterion would also be someone who knew the context of the principal's student leadership, who was close to it and had experienced it at close hand: someone who was at the college but not a teacher in the college.

The personal skills required of the facilitator or 'moderator' are many, and particularly so in the case of groups of children. The facilitator must be sympathetic of the nature of children; each participant must be encouraged to contribute, and none be allowed to dominate, thus enabling the discussions to be comfortable, flowing and fruitful. Conversations must be guided to those which are relevant to the research process but at the same time not excluding or shutting off, those that are later found to be of relative value to the project following closer analysis. And, especially given the nature of this study, the facilitator has to ensure that the language used and phrasing, is suitable for

different groups of students ranging from 11 to 18 year olds and for students of differing abilities and attitude.

At an early stage, the idea of Sixth Form students being utilised to collect research data, either through interview or Focus Group methods, was considered. However, this idea was rejected; it was thought that Sixth Form students would be too close in age and relationship to the students and would find it difficult to detach themselves from being led by the principal from the task of researching the phenomenon. The data collector who did meet the criteria described above, however, was a young member of staff named Luke.

Luke was a member of the intervention team at the college: this is comprised of five, non teaching adults, whose purpose is to intervene directly on students' behalf, sorting out any social, emotional, behavioural or familial problems that a student may have brought into college. They each operate in different ways: some are directive, some are functional and process driven, but Luke operates by close and sympathetic contact with each student at an individual level. He is respected, trusted, well liked and young. Here Luke describes how he was approached to take part and how he felt his involvement may help his own understandings of student behaviour:

"my role in the project was requested by Tom. He explained to me what he was doing and asked if I would mind taking part. I willingly accepted as I thought it would be a really interesting project to be involved with and would enhance my understanding of students' interpretations of school life and what they thought mattered and concerned them. Tom made it clear that I was under no pressure to come out with outcomes that would please him and that at any time I could walk away if I felt uncomfortable. Tom also made it clear that this was a project for him and had no bearing on our work relationship. I felt involved in the process from the start and Tom invited me to meet his supervisor after the interviews had taken place so I could understand the context of the research."

Luke's involvement as co researcher became a significant feature of this research methodology. Initially he was recruited to overcome the ethical issue of the principal collecting data about his student leadership from his own students but very quickly it became apparent that his contribution would be valuable in ensuring a level of objectivity from the principal in this very personal research project. This would be achieved by him taking a lead in the selection of participants for data collection and by him having a role in developing the questions that were being asked and interpreting the data into meaningful themes that illuminate the principal's leadership of students. Each of these issues is discussed below but first the rationale for the choice of focus groups to collect the data should be explained more fully.

3.7.2. Focus Groups

A key consideration when choosing the most suitable method of collecting data was that it should enable the genuine voice of the students to be heard. Using Luke as the means to collect data would go a long way towards this as his personal style and relationship with students would encourage open and genuine responses. However, the choice of context for the data collection could also be used to emphasise open conversation and extended comments from students. A concern over the use of 1:1 interviews, for instance, was that the occasion may have been too stressful for them. Being asked questions about the nature of their relationship with the principal in a face to face interview setting raised real issues of power and intimidation. The interview setting, in this research context, also raised the possibility of large participant agency effects. These could be described as the hidden, invisible, personal choices made by respondents, of what to include or exclude in their responses when prompted by the interviewing researcher. These choices may be decisions about a level of truthfulness, the selection of details to include in an account, the acknowledgement of a power relationship or of taking an opportunity to express personal and unrelated agendas (Cohen et al 2007:374-377).

At the same time it needs to be recognised that evidence produced through group settings with children may be different from that produced in 1:1

interviews. For instance, group settings encourage the effect known as ‘consensus belief’ (Lewis 1992) which describes the human characteristic of not wanting to ‘go against the grain’ or to stand out by disagreeing with the generally held view in a social setting. Nevertheless, the focus group setting was considered most suitable to be used with these groupings of children as it fosters a reliance on “interaction within the group” (Cohen et al 2011: 436) rather than a backward and forward exchange between interviewer and individual. There is also challenging clarification and extension of individual's responses by others in the group, and the stimulation of new ideas (Watts and Ebbutt 1987). Risks can also be taken by the participants in this setting and children who may have remained unresponsive in individual settings, respond and contribute more fully in a group setting. This can be seen in Luke's accounts of each interview in Appendix 1: here it can be seen how his knowledge of the students enables him to encourage the quiet ones and to lessen the impact of the more dominant. This interaction allows the views of the participants to emerge, enabling the researcher to become a *facilitator* of discussions rather than the *agenda setter* for the discussion. This promotes a freer exchange of ideas between participants, and for the data to provide the promise of that rich understanding and meaning of the ‘how’ of my leadership, rather than the ‘what’, and to provide insights that interviews may not.

The groups

College Council	Gender: 3 girls, Crystal, Carol, Corinne ; 2 boys, Charles, Connor , Year Group: Year 7-13 Age:11-12	All are popular, not known for any misbehaviour, articulate and generally supportive of a positive school ethos. The principal's dealings with them will mainly have been at College Council meetings, 6 each year.
Year Eleven	Gender: 3 girls, Emma, Esther, Eve ; 3 boys, Elliot, Ed, Ewan	Some of these will have been known to the principal as they were ‘characters’ whilst others were less prominent. Year 11 students will have known him as their principal for the full term of

	<p>Year Group: Year 11</p> <p>Age: 15-16</p>	their secondary education: they came in his second year of headship. None of them were known as disruptive or behavioural students. One of the boys would have been known for musical ability and another for sport.
Year Seven	<p>Gender: 2 girls, Sara, and Sally; 4 boys, Sam, Scott, Seb, Steven</p> <p>Year Group: Year 7</p> <p>Age: 11-12</p>	These will have had less to do with the principal. None had particular incidents where they would have been 'dealt with' by him and they will have come across him in assemblies, roughly every 6 weeks and just being around the place. By coincidence two of the students have older brothers and sisters in the College.
Known to the principal	<p>Gender: 3 girls, Kendall, Katie, Kara; 3 boys Kyle, Kieran, Kevin.</p> <p>Year Group: Year 7, 9, 10</p> <p>Age: 11-15</p>	Although not deemed the behaviour group, 2 of these students will be known for behaviour reasons. Both are boys and the third boy, whilst not as prominent behaviourally, may also be known for behaviour reasons. All three boys were in yr 10 at the time of being interviewed. The girls were not behavioural students but prominent. One of them had an issue in yr 7 that involved the principal and her parents.
Not Known by the principal	<p>Gender: 3 girls, Nicole, Nina, Natalie; 3 boys, Nathan, Nick, Noah</p> <p>Year Group: Year 10</p> <p>Age: 14-15</p>	None were behaviour students and generally they are middle of the road ability with one of the boys underachieving and one of the girls overachieving.

Behaviour Students	Gender: 3 girls, Beth, Belle, Bridget ; 3 boys, Billy, Ben, Brad Year Group: 7, 8 ,9 Age:11-14	These will be recognised because of their misbehaviour and the measures put into place in attempts to moderate this. They are different levels of intervention; two have spent some time in the on-site provision called TRACs and one has spent time at a PRU.
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Table 3.1: Focus Group Composition

It was decided between Luke and the principal to form 6 focus groups with each group comprising of six students. Each of the groups had an identifying characteristic, either by their cohort (Year 7 and Year 11) or by their proximity to the principal (Known or Not Known) or by attitude to school (Behaviour or Council). An assumption was made that students on the college council would have a more positive and engaged attitude to schooling than those identified for their poor behaviour. In this way the groups were constructed to enable the researcher to gather data from a range of students that would represent as far as possible the student population. It was also constructed to allow the exploration at a later date of the differences in students' perceptions of the principal's leadership, based on age, attitude to school and whether students had more or less experience of the principal; and by keeping an equal mix of gender between the groups, differences in gender perceptions could also be explored. By having students in the groups from across the complete age range would also allow for analysing changes in perceptions over time.

3.7.2.1. Group Composition

As far as possible the students were not known to each other. This has been considered as best practice in focus group composition as it may promote less showing off to friends and more genuine personal response (Hyden and Bulow 2003 in Cohen et al 2011: 436). In practice, however, this was impossible to guarantee and in the Council group, students have some knowledge of each other simply by meeting together 6 times each year. From the outset the

intention was to keep the identity of the students anonymous to the principal in order to ensure one level of objectivity between principal and raw data, and also to ensure any risk of harmful unethical practice was minimal. This meant that the selection of students needed to be made not by the principal but by Luke:

“students were selected by me after deciding the six cohorts of students. My role at the school meant that I came across the whole spectrum of school society and this informed my selection of the groups. For each group I felt it important to try and get an even mix of girls and boys and a mix of extrovert and quieter students. I used this selection technique with all six groups to try and ensure that every group would represent as far as possible all sections of the cohort they represent.”

Having six students in each group was felt to be a number large enough not to allow small group dynamics to dominate, and small enough not to become fragmented and unwieldy. In the end, because of student absence, the Council group became 5 students and the Year 7 Group, 4 boys and 2 girls. Other pragmatic factors, such as the size of the interview space available, and the logistical problem of getting more than six together at one time, were also considerations when settling upon this group size. However, the size of the groups does fall within suggestions from other qualitative researchers using this method. These have suggested that between four and twelve people (Morgan 1988; 43) and six to eight (Fowler 2009:117) are in the optimum range for group size. Six allowed for good discussion with all voices being heard and was about the right number to fit comfortably into the designated space along with the researcher.

3.7.2.2. Group Interviews

The Focus Group interviews took place during the Summer term of 2009. The process of selection and gaining consent are described by Luke in Appendix 2. The account below in which Luke describes how he conducted the interviews conveys their strongly supportive and comfortable flavour and feel.

“At times I would press students to give more detail about what they meant and ask them for reasons and examples why they felt this. From my own point of view, there were several times when I felt students were making really good points and would let

them continue even if it meant going off the question. There were other times when the students would start talking about something that wasn't particularly relevant so I would try and steer them back to the point of the discussion. There were some groups which appeared more fruitful than others and some students who contributed more than others. I believe this is the nature of the beast when dealing with students, who can be very vocal at points and reserved at others. I did try to involve all students in the interviews and feel that it further proves that the groups were representative of a cross-section of those students – some had more to say than others and others made fewer points but gave very succinct answers.”

3.7.3. Discussion Prompts

The nature and form of the prompts that are used in focus group discussion are vital in ensuring that good data can be collected. They are questions but open ended and of such a nature that they will lead to what has been described as ‘free discussion’ and ‘freewheeling discussion’ (Keegan and Powney 1987). They should allow for an interchange of ideas amongst the participants and consequently offer a better understanding of meaning for the researcher. They differ from a list of questions that may be used in questionnaires or in formal 1:1 interviews which are designed to be analysed quantitatively; their purpose is to promote discussion amongst participants and as such the actual wording can vary according to the composition of the group and the immediate context of the group setting. In the case of this project where the groups comprise of children of different ages, gender and attitude, the language used by the facilitator would change to accommodate different levels of understanding and conceptual comprehension. However, it is important that the areas of discussion remain the same for each group so that comparisons can be made between students of differing attributes.

For focus groups to work well it is important that the topics for discussion are interesting and relevant to participants and not just to the researcher. This is especially true when the participants are children. It would not be valuable to get groups of children to discuss things they are not interested in and for this reason it was decided between the principal and Luke to do some rough and ready market research amongst a group of Year 8 students to discover what

areas of the principal's leadership they felt were useful and to gauge from their enthusiasm or lack of it what areas would be useful to build the focus group interviews around.

It was agreed that Luke would meet a group of Yr 8 students following an Assembly that the principal delivered to them in order to give a focus to the discussion. The Assembly was recorded on DVD so that it was available if necessary to be played back during the discussion. The discussion with Luke took place during a 50 minute drama lesson the day after the assembly with the permission of the drama teacher. The students were asked 10 questions which explored their view of the principal and the idea of student leadership. The students were asked to write their responses to the questions and then volunteers were asked to read out their responses to the rest of the group.

The first question asked the students what they remembered about the Assembly and the rest were asking for their views about the principal; in short what he does and how does he affect them. At this stage the questions were created by Luke after an initial conversation and email exchange with the principal about the broad nature of the research project (Appendix 2). The questions are listed in Appendix 3; as well as indicating areas and questions that could prove useful for the focus group interviews the students' written answers could also be utilised later as analysable data themselves. Much of it is incisive and illuminating about students' perceptions of what principals do and what students expect of them. For instance, in answer to the question "what influence will the head have on you in the time you are here" the responses include "he will be here through my changes and help me make my choices", "I will always remember the aerobics lessons he taught us...And, when he handed over our medals...But I don't think there wouldn't be any influence." The responses to another question "what does Mr Blue do in this school?" are equally enticing. One girl thinks that he "manages the teachers, tells people off, speaks in assemblies (sic), makes up the rules," another that "he tracks down anyone that has done anything wrong in the school...He sends out the report

that we get given,” and a third, that “Mr Blue looks after the school, students and staff; he makes sure everyone is trying their best. He runs the school.”

The findings and discussion that followed this experiment with Yr 8 between Luke and the principal did establish the areas of questioning that would promote discussion amongst the students. Another factor in developing the prompts was Luke’s personal observation of the principal and his interaction with students. This was an additional benefit of the use of a co researcher who acted as a second and more objective view of the concept of principal student leadership. Luke’s description of the process of forming the original areas of questioning in collaboration with the Principal is included as Appendix 4. A sample of the student prompts utilised by Luke when exploring the theme students’ conceptualisations of the principal’s student leadership, is given in Appendix 6. These demonstrate a fluidity and responsiveness to context, which is more appropriate to focus group methods seeking to explore broad identified themes, rather than seeking answers to previously agreed specific questions, more common in structured or semi structured group interviews.

With these created, it was decided to trial them with the first group, the Year 11s. This was to be considered a pilot to see if the questions worked. Luke’s words best describe the reasons why this group was chosen as a pilot and indicate clearly its success:

“the first interview conducted was with the Year 11 group. This was done initially as a pilot, but worked well and we felt came up with pleasing results and well thought out replies. After going through the recording I felt this was the direction to go in and we stuck with the interview and used the same questions and method in the rest of the interviews. There was also a time factor involved, as the Year 11s were coming up for exam leave and logically it would have been a push to complete the interviews in between exams etc. although this would have been done had the initial interview not been so successful. We decided to do the Year 11 group as the pilot, because we believed this would be the group that were best able to vocalise their thoughts and therefore probably the most informative group – allowing us to see if we need to make any changes to the format or questioning. Although originally designed to be the pilot, it was successful so this became the framework for all subsequent interviews.”

3.8. Presenting the Data

3.8.1 Transcription

The data that was collected from the six focus groups was rich, personal, idiosyncratic and full of meaning. It consisted of voice recordings of thirty five students and it was decided that transcribing these voice recordings into electronic, written text form, would more easily enable their analysis.

Transcription is a recognised means of turning voice data into written form and commonly used in qualitative research methodology. However, at each level of analysis the data becomes one step further removed from the researcher and its real time meaning, and so the decision to transcribe should be carefully considered. In this investigation where the researcher himself was not the collector of the data and was not present at the focus group meetings where it was generated, these considerations seem especially relevant.

The decision to keep the identity of the students from the principal meant that he would not be able to transcribe the data himself as he would undoubtedly have identified some students from their voices. In some ways this is a limitation on the nature of the interpretation as this would have provided an opportunity for him to gain knowledge of the voice data and to hear the intonations and group interactions that were part of responses. These features of any interaction are part of the melange of impressions and experiences that go towards the full meaning of voice expression and if possible need to be captured and considered. However, what would be missed if the facilitator of the focus groups, Luke, did not transcribe the data, would be the first hand contextual knowledge that being present in the moment of data generation brings. As Luke was willing to transcribe, and with a view to achieving maximum accuracy in transcription, it was agreed that he would carry out the transcription in close collaboration with the principal. Both would review sections of completed transcription at regular meetings and Luke could describe the actual context of phrases or interchanges from the tape. The recordings were made on a professional quality machine and a foot pedal was used to enable easy pausing to help transcription and also to check meaning in these sessions.

Table 3.2 is an extract from the data transcription and it can be seen that the form is a straightforward verbatim reproduction of the exact flow and thread of the interviews with the prompts of the facilitator clearly visible. The responses of each individual were colour coded in the transcription document to allow for a very visible level of analysis of individual contribution. All exclamations and hesitations are recorded, but not timings or accompanying observational notes by the leader.

Okay then guys, the next question is.... Do teachers deal with students the same way the Headteacher does...?

No...

I don't know...

No... so what's the difference... what's the difference between your teacher talking to you and the Headteacher talking to you....?

The head teacher... I just got sent out from Ms X and I was standing there and he came along with Mr Red and started shouting at me - why am I out...

So how is that different to how the teachers deal with you?

Cos they just come out and say - oh I'm gonna give you a chance Brad or you're going to Intervention... they don't come out and start shouting at you...

So the Headteacher... sometimes... just sees you sent out and knows you're in trouble so shouts at you... yeah, is that right...?

Mmh...

Table 3.2: transcription format

3.8.2 Thematic Coding

Once transcribed it was necessary to interpret the student data into meaningful information that would help answer the research questions. The first stage of this involved a two way process of discussion and reflection between Luke and myself. Mostly this took place before the coding process described below but was important in shaping the principal's conceptions of the codes that would be used. This extract from Luke's notes describes how this worked:

"Tom and I frequently discussed how the interviews went and looked at the transcripts together and separately, then comparing notes about what was working well and if there

was anything we could do to improve the research. We kept the question framework as they were for the interviews as these were a good foundation. At our meeting with (supervisor) we discussed several of the ideas in the transcripts, especially the idea of 'Respect'. This point raised very interesting views from the students and we discussed what we felt was meant by respect in terms of the students and if that differed from the outlook we held."

Luke's reflections on his involvement in the project prompted him to write a paper which is included in Appendix 5. It is entitled Second round of Student Interviews: rough pointers for discussion. This Appendix is a scanned image of Luke's original handwritten document presented to the principal before the beginning of the coding process and discussed at length with him. It contains a range of Luke's ideas about students' perceptions of the principal's leadership which have emerged from Luke's own intuition, observation of the principal's leadership style, and his leadership of students, Luke's own reading on leadership and above all, from his reflections on the findings from the focus group interviews and transcriptions. This document serves as an exposition of the issues that are highlighted by the students and gives an indication of themes that are being suggested (Appendix 5a). This paper followed the focus group interviews in preparation for a follow up interview with two focus group students, sisters who contributed in different focus groups. The intention was to explore the suggestive themes from the focus groups in more depth. The themes that were identified were discussed at length with the principal and his annotations can be seen in two places on the paper. This was the extent of Luke's role in the interpretation of the data; however, as can be seen, it was significant in shaping the initial coding and many of the themes he identified appear as codes in the CAQDAS analysis.

The data was analysed using CAQDAS, *Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis* methods. Several researchers have summarised the ways in which information technology can be utilised to enhance qualitative research and have indicated the uses that it can be put towards (eg. Gibbs 2007, Flick 2009, Cohen and Mannion 2011). The use of the software came to be an integral part of the research process. It is a very powerful tool at all stages of the analytical process and proved to be invaluable in the first level of grouping the data into themes or Codes. Coding has been defined in several ways: Cohen et al

describe its purpose as “the reduction of copious amounts of written data to manageable and comprehensible proportions” (Cohen et al 2011: 559), whilst Gibb captures the nature of codes when writing that the same code is given to an item of text that says the same thing or is about to say the same thing (Gibbs 2007:38). Coding is “the process of disassembling and reassembling” the data” (Cohen et al 2011: 599); breaking apart lines of transcribed dialogue or paragraphs or sections of text, or as in this analysis, into the individual comments made by each participant. In this way the rearrangement leads to a new understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. However, Saldana provides a more useful description for the practising researcher. He describes coding as “the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (Saldana 2009: 4). He makes a distinction between two purposes of coding, *encoding* and *decoding*, which are commonly referred to together as coding but have very different intentions:

“note that when we reflect on a passage of data to decipher its core meaning, we are decoding; when we determine its appropriate code and label it we are encoding” (Saldana: 4).

These different intentions of coding can be referred to as first level (encoding) and second level (decoding) processes. Both are interpreting meaning from the data but the second level may be described as more data analysis than data coding. The creation of the thematic codes here can be described as 'conceptual' outcomes where “the analyst may have some a priori ideas about items that derive from the same overarching theme” (Miles & Huberman 1994: 127).

It must also be remembered, however, that coding is a hermeneutic process of interpretation on the part of the researcher which is adding a second level of interpretation to that already made by the participants. As such there is much at stake in the coding process and great care must be taken to constantly check, reflect, and compare the data being grouped into the same coding or theme. This checking involves using ‘constant comparison’ to check the meaning of each chunk of data against other bits of data, in order to establish a fit that is consistent with other codes. In this way the data is turned into information that

can inform the purpose of the investigation which is to explore the students' perception of my leadership of them.

The strength of using software as the coding tool is that it keeps the researcher close to the data. It allows the researcher to code and then uncode easily and repeatedly; to structure and then restructure and to test out new coding structures just to see if they fit better. It also forces the researcher at each coding point to constantly reassess and revisit codes enabling real consistency of meaning within each coding to be achieved. Through constant reflection the process demands the creation of a consistent taxonomy, a structure and hierarchy that is shaped by what the data is telling you.

3.8.3. From Raw Data to Coding

The tables below, Tables 3:3, 3:4, 3:5 demonstrate the process by which the transcribed raw data became assigned to a code. Initially the Focus Group transcriptions were imported into NVIVO as separate internal sources and from these individual student identities (Cases) were created. The text of each student voice was then examined systematically, line by line, and either included in an already existing code that was suggested, or a subset of an existing code, which comprised of a related or nuanced meaning of that code, or a completely new code. In this way the words of students from all focus groups appearing to have similar meaning could be assigned to proto themes that were suggested by the data. Table 3:3 is a short extract from the Case data for a behaviour girl (bvr green girl), with stripes (coding stripes) on the right hand side of the screen at the top being displayed. These show some of the coding themes and sub themes (nodes) that chunks of transcribed data have been assigned to. These include 'Being Known seems important to students but there are differing experiences', 'not being known', 'pride and motivation', 'authority', 'presence 1', and 'being known is good'. Other codes that data has been assigned to are identified here as purple ('teachers see things differently') and red ('different with teachers'). More coding stripes can be displayed but for exemplification purposes here the number has been limited to twelve. Across the centre of the screen shot a horizontal ribbon demonstrates the coding

density of a particular piece of text, which at this analytical stage was coded to two nuanced meanings of ‘the relationship with teachers is different’.

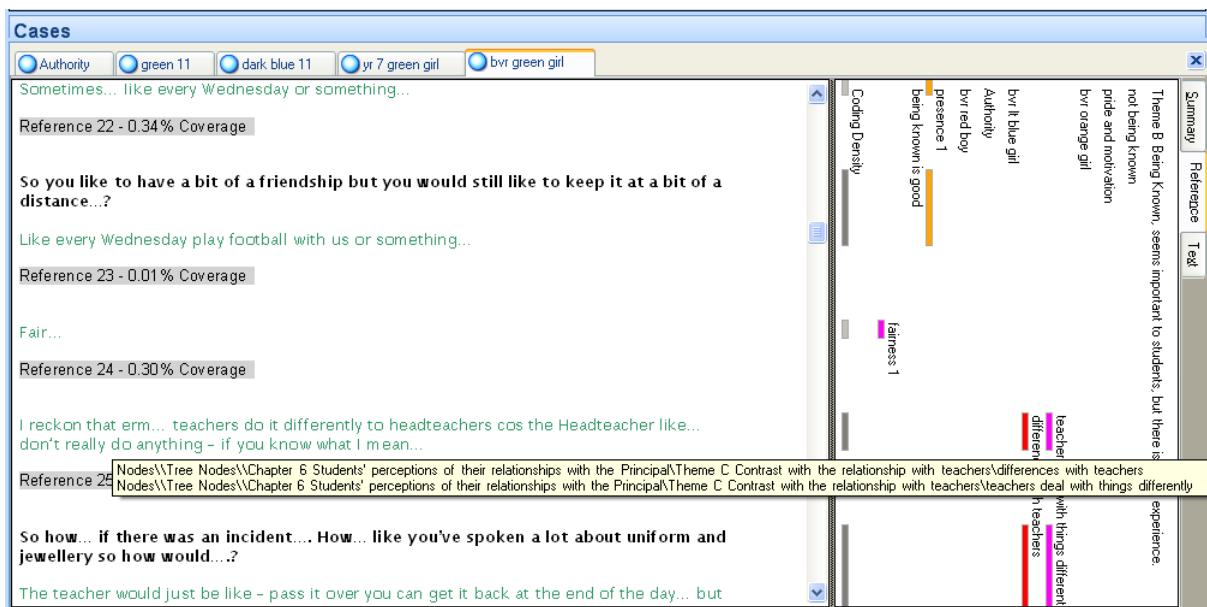


Table 3:3 Case (bvr green girl) data with coding stripes displayed.

Tables 3:4 and 3:5 go on to demonstrate how an assigned chunk of Case data, in this case a member of the Year 11 Focus Group, and identified as Lt Blue, is displayed in a coded theme. Table 3:4 is a snapshot from NVIVO of the Case data for Lt blue containing an extract of text that became part of the coding of ‘Authority’. The piece of text “You have to be authoritative and approachable at the same time....” is included in the coding of ‘Authority’ (Table 3:5), along with many other chunks of text from the other student cases (55 references) that have been judged to construct the meaning of the code.

Cases

It blue 11

<Internals\focus groups\STEyr 11 03 (2)> - § 25 references coded [5.19% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.35% Coverage

So fairness seems to be, quite a big sort of... subject here - you feel it's important that a Headteacher is fair to all students - treats everyone equally?

You have to be authoritative but approachable at the same time....

Reference 2 - 0.27% Coverage

So you mean that you have to... what he always has to be telling people what to do or... how do you mean authoritative...?

No you just have to have authority over the kids...

Reference 3 - 0.13% Coverage

Okay, so erm... When do you see the head leading students then?

Erm....

Assemblies....

Reference 4 - 0.09% Coverage

Table 3:4 Year 11 student Lt BI Case data

Tree Nodes

Authority

And I think if we had a really bad headmaster then we wouldn't have a good education and we would like end up losing the world as it is...

Reference 17 - 0.21% Coverage

So you think of someone quite scary... someone whose quite powerful sort of thing?

Yeah, like Henry VIII...

<Internals\focus groups\STEyr 11 03 (2)> - § 6 references coded [2.25% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.35% Coverage

So fairness seems to be, quite a big sort of... subject here - you feel it's important that a Headteacher is fair to all students - treats everyone equally?

You have to be authoritative but approachable at the same time....

Reference 2 - 0.55% Coverage

So do you think that it's because of an authority figure sort of thing?

Yeah... in a way cos they're like the main head of the school and its kind of a bit scary in a way cos you think... like I must of done something really bad if you're like talking to him cos...

Table 3:5 Snapshot of Authority sub theme coding including (Lt BI Year 11) phrase

Through this rigorous process a coding structure, which, it was decided, carried meaning for the students' perceptions of the principal's leadership of them, was created. At this *encoding* level (Saldana 2009:4), the process consisted of creating codes that were being suggested from the data, and which appeared relevant in illuminating the research sub questions. The choice to use the sub questions as a means of grouping codes together was an initial heuristic aimed at giving the project analysable shape: the neatness of the final presentation hides much messiness and imprecision in the earlier stages. Cohen et al recognise this suggesting that "the early part of coding should be confusing, with a mass of apparently unrelated material" (2011: 600). This was confirmed in this investigation as it was only as coding progressed and themes emerged that the analysis became organised and structured.

3.8.4 Coding Structure

Tables 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, and 3.9 included below are illustrative examples of the analytical structure which emerged from the coding process. It would be accurate to describe this process as creative, reflective, fluid and evolutionary. Initially three themes were categorised as the main themes, the main codes which the software describes as *parent nodes*, and sitting beneath these are *sibling nodes*, sub themes which are clearly associated with the meaning of the parent node. Table 3.6 illustrates the first level of a tree structure of codes showing four parent nodes, three of them the research sub questions, with the first one expanded to reveal its three sibling (sub) nodes sitting below.

Tree Nodes

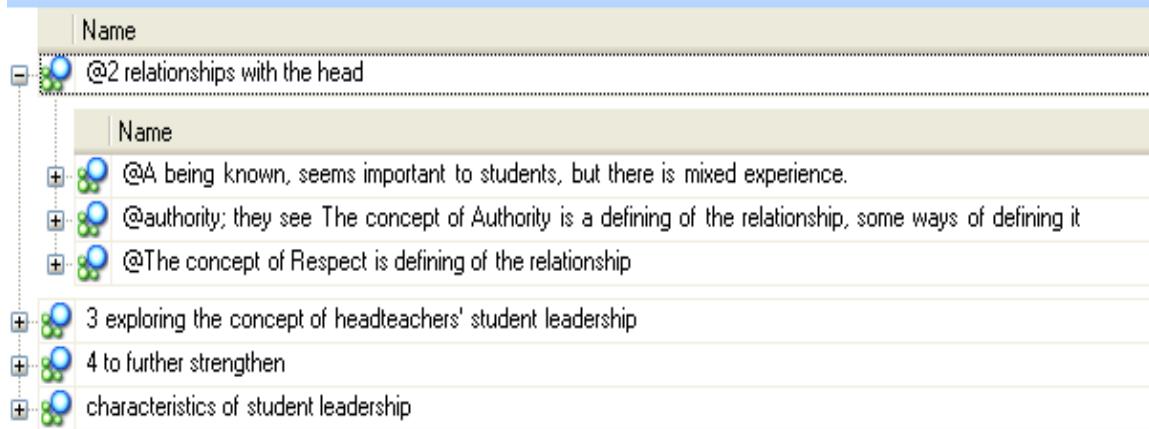


Table 3.6: Main (parent) codes (nodes)

Table 3.7 again shows the four parent nodes with the first one expanded to show the three sibling nodes, but now one of these has also been expanded to show thirteen other sibling nodes and one of these, '*students are keen to make the contrast or comparison with teachers*' has been expanded one further level.

Tree Nodes

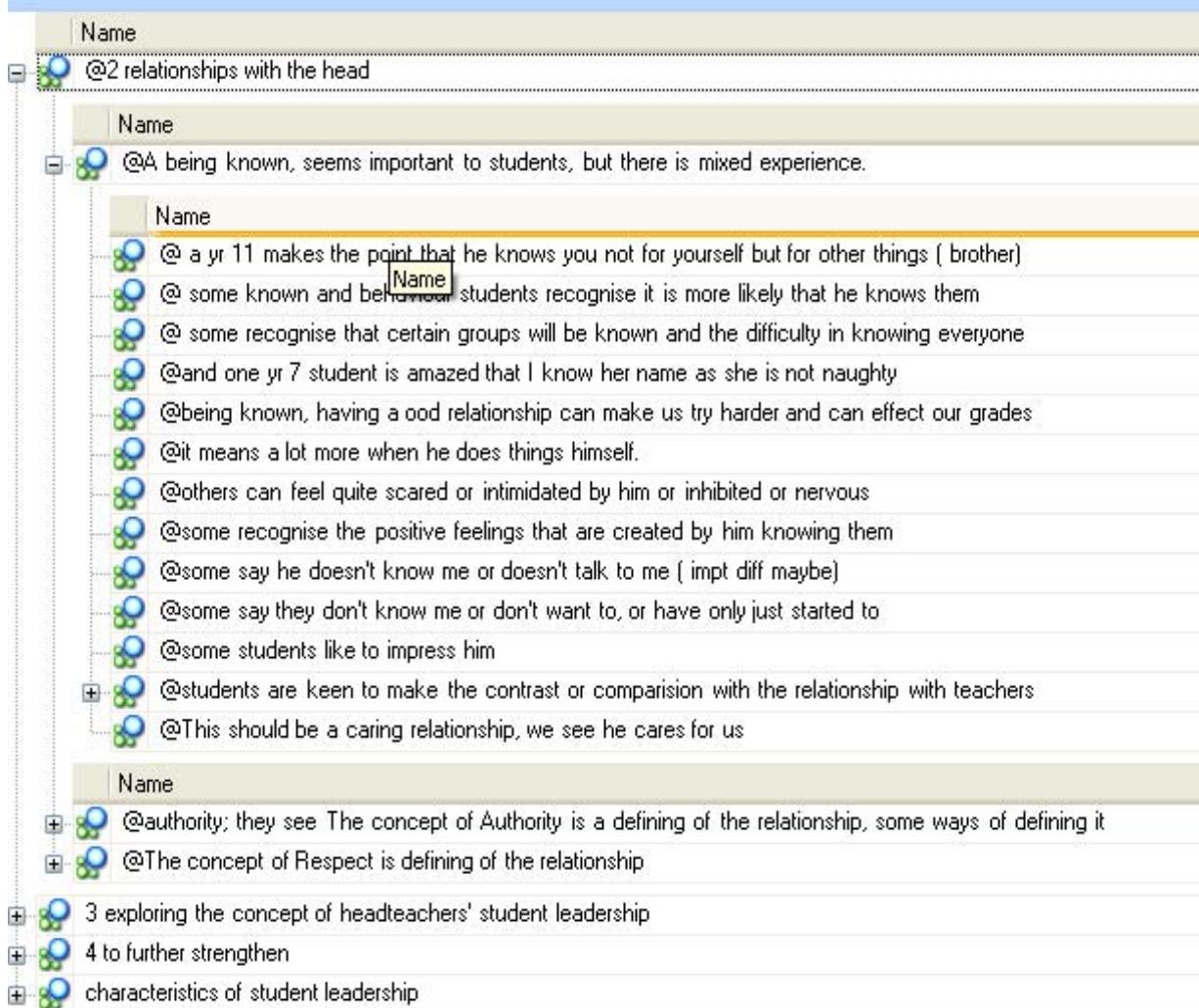


Table 3.7: Main (Parent) and Sub (sibling) code (node) structure

All in all, at this stage it can be seen that the structure comprises of 4 parent nodes, 31 sibling at level 2 nodes, 30 sibling at level 3, 30 at level 4, 4 at level 5 and 1 at level 6. Although the structural arrangement is hierarchical with sibling nodes being connected to parent nodes through related meaning, the position of each node in the hierarchy is not relative: each can carry similar weight or significance. The codes are simply groupings of references with similar meanings in the understanding of the researcher. However, the further breakdown of the parent nodes into related sub themes or nodes allows the researcher to explore the meanings deeper and reveal *essential* meanings and *nuanced* understandings of individual students and their interpretation of aspects of the main theme.

In Table 3.8 the concept of Respect which has been identified as an important theme is found as a sibling node, a sub theme of the parent node *relationships with the head*. This sibling node is then subdivided itself into 4 further sibling nodes: *he gets more or less respect than others; he gets respect (listened to or not); he respects us, we want respect; we respect him more because we don't know him so well.*

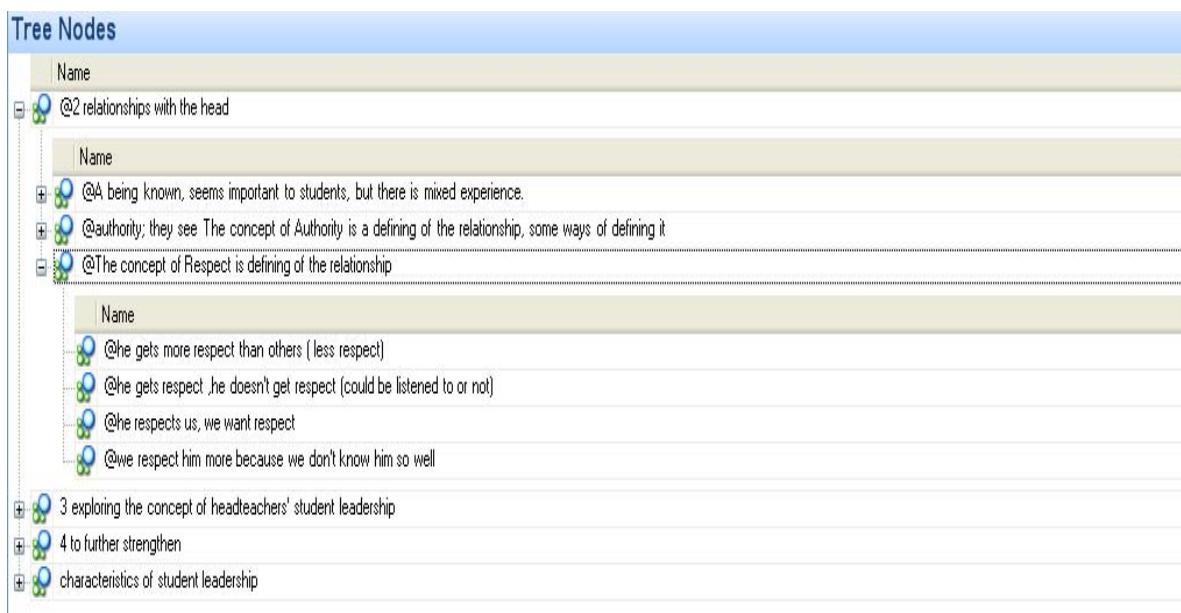


Table 3.8: Respect sub node

Examples of these descriptive names have been included above but the node illustrated below, *Being known seems important to students, but there is mixed experience* in Table 3.9 serves to demonstrate the richness and ease of interpretation that the full description provides.

Name	
@A being known, seems important to students, but there is mixed experience.	
Name	
@ a yr 11 makes the point that he knows you not for yourself but for other things (brother)	
@ some known and behaviour students recognise it is more likely that he knows them	
@ some recognise that certain groups will be known and the difficulty in knowing everyone	
@and one yr 7 student is amazed that I know her name as she is not naughty	
@being known, having a good relationship can make us try harder and can effect our grades	
@it means a lot more when he does things himself.	
@others can feel quite scared or intimidated by him or inhibited or nervous	
@some recognise the positive feelings that are created by him knowing them	
@some say he doesn't know me or doesn't talk to me (impt diff maybe)	
@some say they don't know me or don't want to, or have only just started to	
@some students like to impress him	
@students are keen to make the contrast or comparison with the relationship with teachers	
@This should be a caring relationship, we see he cares for us	

Table 3.9: being known seems important but there is mixed experience

The final thematic structure that emerged from this reflective process and which was used as the basis for analysis is that illustrated in the tables 4.1. 5.1 and 6.1. These are included at the start of each of chapters 4, 5 and 6, the data chapters. It can be seen that the themes and sub themes that are included there have been shaped by the nuances and shades of meaning represented at the detailed embryonic stages of interpretation.

3.8.5 Coding Limitations

The sections above (3.8.2-3.8.4) demonstrate the processes and measures that have been utilised to make sense of the student data and to convey its meaning as reliably as possible. However, beyond the already explained difficulties when interpreting qualitative data, the problem of seeing through other people's eyes, it must be acknowledged that any framework constructed to assist analysis such as that described above, constrains and guides interpretation in an artificial way. For this study, the search for meaning from the data of 35 separate student voices is done so at the expense of the individual stories of the student participants. This can be described as a focus on the general rather than the individual case and has been a choice made necessary by the

bounded nature of the research resources of time and scale. The analysis is representative of a cross sectional view of the student perception of the student leadership of the principal rather than a holistic representation from individuals. However, as described above, the focus group data has been redistributed to each student and is available for analysis in the future. This is an intention of the researcher but the detail of the individual narrative and the insights that analysis of this may bring remain outside the scope of this study.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Previous to the commencement of the project the research proposal outlining the research methodology, including the use of student participants and the utilisation of an employee of the researcher, received a *Certificate of ethical research approval* from the ethics committee of the School of Education and Lifelong Learning. This is included as Appendix 7.

3.9.1 Students' Rights

Like scientific research, social science research raises ethical issues and BERA guidelines remind us that “in research involving human participants....additional, and more complex, issues arise” (Bera 2011). These issues gain further complexity in educational research with the implicit coercive relationship which exists between teachers and learners. It is an especially important concern for this project involving children as participants in a study investigating the concept of student leadership by their own principal. It could be argued that in this situation, there exists a significant possibility of coercive behaviour by the principal/ researcher, leading to students being intimidated and feeling at best uncomfortable. In order to avoid this, careful consideration was given to the method of data collection.

The main safeguard put in place to avoid any risk to the student participants is that described above, namely the use of a specially chosen, familiar, but non teaching, co researcher, other than the principal. This feature of the research design is such a major feature that further discussion seems relevant. In any

research set in a school, the principal or headteacher would seek guarantees from the researcher that their pupils would be safe and not at risk in any way: Gorman describes this as a principle of ‘non maleficence’ (2007) operative in all research settings, but for a principal it is more than a consideration for research purposes: keeping children safe in school is the *fundamental* requirement of the role.

Utilising Luke as a co researcher enabled the coercive relationship that must exist between a principal and his students to be diminished. However, to ensure that students were willing and happy participants it was important that the research process was described to students and that they acknowledge their understanding of the process and their willingness to participate in written form. This important ethical consideration is described in the research literature as ‘informed consent’ (Crotty, 1998, Cohen et al, 2007). Luke distributed ethical consent forms to all 35 students participating in the research and described the purpose of the research with them and the process. The forms used were Exeter University ethical consent forms which contain the option for participants to withdraw at any stage from the project and other protections of anonymity and data protection considerations. Signed forms were received from all 35 participants and two of these are included as examples in Appendix 8. As all the participants, including the Sixth formers were under 18 at the time of the research, parental written consent was also obtained. Luke also contacted the parents by telephone to explain the purpose of the research. It can be seen that the names of students and parents on the form have been blanked out by Luke, who had to organise this important part of the process to ensure that the identity of the students remained invisible to the principal.

However, it is possible that the nature of the relationship between Luke and the students could also have contained a similar feature of dominance as that between the students and the principal as Luke was also in a position of authority over them. This is why the choice of the co researcher was especially important. Luke’s position as a non teaching adult, at a distance from teachers and at a further distance from the principal, whose role was perceived by

students as being an intermediary acting on their behalf with teachers and the principal, placed him, in students' eyes, as a non threatening, trustworthy, reliable, comfortable adult in whom they could express true feelings and views. These student perceptions of Luke were further confirmed by his personal characteristics and traits: his warmth, affability, willingness to listen, reliability and honesty with them fitted him well in the role of co researcher.

A further measure that was taken in order to protect student rights was the decision made on both ethical and methodological grounds that Luke should choose the participants and keep their identity hidden. Student anonymity was both methodologically desirable in order to avoid accusations of selectivity of student participants and researcher subjectivity; but also ethically imperative, as comments identified to individuals by the principal, could have become significant in future relationships between them. Nevertheless, despite rigorous attempts by both researchers to ensure anonymity, student participants themselves found it less easy to keep the secret.

3.9.2 Employee Rights

Utilising a co researcher, an employee, raised another ethical issue. This was the possibility of exploitation and coercion. Luke was a direct subordinate and may not have wished to participate in the research project; even though he said he was very keen, this expression of enthusiasm may have been borne out of more negative than positive feelings. To alleviate such concerns these issues were addressed personally with Luke, and comments from another colleague, close to Luke, relayed to me, confirmed that Luke was indeed enthusiastic to carry out the work. His overt interest and his commitment in researching independently into the area, and attending a supervisory visit with me, all seemed to support the idea that his participation was willing and affirmative to him. Luke received no extra payment for the interviews which took place in school time but was paid for his time on transcription.

3.9.3. Value Added

Other ethical issues considered were those around the nature of insider professional research and the value added by the research project to my own school. This investigation is about leadership research but it is researching my own practice in my own school. This focus on my own professional practice could be said to be self indulgent and that resources such as my time, Luke's time, student participant learning time and school funds supporting the research, could be better spent elsewhere and with more benefit to the students and school community. But this justification will always be problematic and open to subjective judgements and opinions from a range of stakeholders. The justification for the project will ultimately lie in its effect on the members of the school community, but this judgement itself will be open to subjective opinion. Which effects and which members of the community should be considered when making these difficult judgements?

Perhaps the justification for the project should have a more straightforward assessment criterion: will it make me a better principal? But this too will not eliminate subjective opinions: 'better in what way?' would be the immediate question. And maybe the only reasonable justification for the project is that the intention of the research investigation is to do good. It is a project not carried out for personal gain or status but in the interests of my own school. I was approached by an earlier chair of governors to undertake doctoral research in leadership, as a performance objective six years ago and have been supported in this by the governors throughout this time. I have reported to them regularly on progress and they are keen to receive the final thesis. Their premise in making the initial invitation was that leadership counts in school improvement and that it would be a good idea for their school leader to get as good as possible at it: this professional doctorate is a piece of professional development.

The methodology then for this investigation was necessarily designed with the very personal, idiographic nature of the project in mind. The position from the inside, in my own school, has offered a practical opportunity to gather useful evidence of my leadership of students. What would have been lost from being on the outside is the close and detailed contextual knowledge of school ethos,

operations, and locality, which give depth to the situations described by the participants. Stake describes how “phenomena need accurate description” (Stake 2000:95) and it is with this in mind that the choice of methodology described in this chapter, a Case Study within the interpretive paradigm should be judged.

Chapter 4

Data Presentation

Conceptualisations of the Principal's Student Leadership

4.1 General Introduction

This chapter provides a general introduction and rationale for the presentation of the data and the presentation and analysis of one section of the data; that describing students' conceptualisations of the principal's student leadership. The data chapters, 4, 5, and 6, each present the findings which have been interpreted from the student participant responses to questions seeking answers to the research sub questions

- How do students conceptualise student leadership?
- What do students perceive to be the characteristics of student leadership?
- What are students' perceptions of the qualities of the relationship between the principal and students?

The structure of each data chapter follows the same format. This includes a table of the main themes and sub themes, which is included at the start of the chapter. The table contains the number of references coded to the theme, the number of students making the reference and a brief description of the criteria for the thematic coding. However, this is neither an attempt to analyse the data quantitatively nor to make assumptions or draw conclusions from the amount of content, weighted or not, behind particular themes. This study recognises the value of a theme, which emerges from a single statement, that demonstrates an understanding and meaning of student leadership as much as those generated by the statements of many students. The table is included as a heuristic to enable the reader to see more clearly the data behind each interpretation and as a result, understand more fully the nuances of the concept of student leadership.

The study aims to explore students' experience of student leadership in a very personal context: the relationship with their own principal, Mr Blue. The data largely represents this construction of the concept with most comments inferentially or directly referencing 'principal student leadership' as that contained in the person of Mr Blue. The data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 are most evidently of this nature and illustrate students' descriptions of the characteristics of student leadership and qualities of its relationships are that are tied up in the persona of the individual. However, on occasions the conceptualisation is more abstract. This is especially apparent in Chapter 4 where more general conceptualisations of 'principal student leadership' are being sought. A summary at the end of each chapter draws together the main findings in light of the research sub question and the relevant key issues derived from the review of the literature.

Chapter 5 presents the thematic data and its analysis most relevant to the subsidiary question *what do students perceive to be the characteristics of student leadership?* Chapter 6 presents data illuminative of the question *what are students' perceptions of the qualities of the relationship between the principal and students?*

4.2. Students' Conceptualisations of the Principal's Student Leadership

To establish how students have conceptualised their understanding of the principal's student leadership, comments in response to questions that sought to establish their views on the importance of having a principal and his activities that make up student leadership, were analysed together. From these areas of questioning two thematic codes emerged:

Theme 4A: The Importance of having a Principal. This theme connects student comments that reflect their perception of the value of the principal's leadership in general. Three co elements emerged from the data as constituents of this theme and are named after student phrases which seem to capture the essence of their meaning and make sense of the data. These are: 'the man in charge', 'the man in the shadow', and 'the teachers' leader'.

Theme 4B: Roles that Constitute Student Leadership. The second theme that became identifiable in this section exploring students' conceptions of the principal's student leadership was that which contained descriptions of behaviours and actions, activities that they see the principal carrying out. In effect, students are describing a series of roles and functions that form part of their general concept of what the principal does when he is leading them. These different roles have been categorised as three sub themes: 'checking up', 'education' and 'managing'.

The comments that contribute to these themes and the number of students and references that are included in each coding are listed below in table 4:1.

<i>Theme 4A : The Importance of having a Principal</i>			
Code Name	Coding Criteria	Students	References
The Man in Charge	Comments that indicate a perception that the principal is at the top, the man in charge of the school and those comments that suggest students think	15	23

	that it is important to have someone in this position.		
The Man in the Shadow	Comments that indicate that it is not necessary for the school to have a principal or head at the top, or that the principal has had any effect on them, either face to face or in anything that he does.	12	19
The Teachers' Leader	Comments indicating that students recognise that teachers have to have a leader	13	18
<i>Theme 4B: The Roles that Constitute Student Leadership</i>			
Checking up	Comments that describe an authoritarian, controlling role which affects both students and teachers. It involves checking up on, and catching out students and teachers, and then enforcing the rules.	21	27
Managing	Comments that describe a managerial role which involves getting resources, including buildings, money, and teachers	19	28
Education	Comments that describe an educational role that recognises the principal's direct involvement and direct effect with student instructional matters including curriculum, assessment and setting.	11	14

Table 4.1: Students' conceptualisations of the principal's student leadership: thematic framework

4.2.1. Theme 4A: The Importance of having a Principal

4.2.1.1. *The Man in Charge*

This conception of leadership as ‘the man in charge’ is a strong finding from the data. It can be described as the common sense, traditional heroic view of leadership that associates authority and power with the named leader, ‘the man in charge’: in this case the principal. There was a strong consensus amongst students that it is important to have someone in charge, a leader, a person at the top. Over half of the students described this top down, hierarchical model of leadership with comments such as having “*like Mr Man who is top of the school*” (C1) and “*you’ve gotta like have one main person*” (K2), or “*you’ve gotta have a Headteacher cos like else all the teachers... like everybody, like everybody.... you’ve gotta have somebody like at the top*” (K6). Emma is even clearer about the need for a leader suggesting “*it’s basically human nature... you need to be led*” (115) and receives support from another Year 11 student, Ed, who confirms that “*if our school just said – there’s not going to be a head teacher, there’s not going to be any leader – I think over time...a leader will emerge, like someone will start saying... right you do this, you do that... right let’s do this ...some teacher will take authority.... try and be higher than other people*” (112).

This concept is also described metaphorically. Each of the following references defines a clear pictorial image of how these students understand the principal’s leadership. Steven’s is perhaps the most striking:

“I reckon Mr Blue and the teachers are the same, but Mr Blue’s a bit like a head... like on the human body –or the heart, cos he keeps everything running” (76).

Charles uses a different metaphor but with a similar sense:

“like I said a minute ago like the students are the children and he’s like the father of the school ... you know, so we need somebody to look up to... like cos children look up to their fathers and that” (C2).

A third image is used by Christopher, another member of the College Council. He responds to this reflection from Luke “so you sort of see the headteacher as *like the manager – the person who deals with the big important decisions and things like that, but not so much with the day-to-day...?*” (Luke, Council FG) with

the comment “*yeah, cos like Mr Green is like one of the coaches – one of the ones who like talk to you and train you*” (C5). The implication being that the principal is at a distance from him, above the coaches (teachers) who actually do the training and who have a close relationship, whereas it may be assumed he views the principal as the Chairman of the Club who does not usually don the tracksuit and get involved with the players (students). Finally, these two students introduce the notion of the principal as figurehead. Nina sees that the principal “*like presents the school,*” (N2), and Elliot wants him to “*kinda more to just be the person responsible for the school cos he’s like the face of the school*” (111).

The model of leadership being described contains a strong sense of direction and control. There is an understanding by Eve that the principal provides the direction and focus for the college and that “*without a principal...school would be a bit lost...It’d be mayhem*” (116). Ed concurs with the view suggesting that “*without a headteacher I don’t think people would know what to do... cos obviously he tells different...what to do...and orders about and stuff*” (112). Corinne is adamant in suggesting that “*there’s got to be some control*” (C3) whilst Kara values having a principal as “*it keeps structure in the school and keeps it all running smoothly*” (K5). Interestingly, Elliot confirms the need for leadership from the top in a roundabout way by insisting that “*it could be alright without a headteacher though... and just have another type of leader figure – I don’t think it necessarily has to be called a headteacher...I don’t think you need to have a teaching degree... cos I think a teaching degree is just so you can teach people, but being a headteacher isn’t really a teacher at all*” (111). In a similar vein Natalie chooses to separate out the leadership of teachers from that of the principal’s, implying the desirability of the need for a leader above teachers:

“cos that way he can say like.... You can be in charge sort of thing like...Cos, he shows like, kinda like... I mean there’s loads of other teachers that are in control but then there’s like” (N6).

What this finding seems to indicate is that students have a strong conceptualisation of the principal’s leadership and that it has some bearing on them in school. The view of the 15 students who suggested that having a leader

is important is one that represents a traditional, heroic view of a leader who is in control, sets the direction of the institution, and is recognised as its public face. The more sophisticated perspective suggested by Elliott's observation that principal leadership could be disassociated from expertise or background in teaching, emphasises the conceptualisation of contained leadership even more.

4.2.1.2. *The Man in the Shadow.*

However, for others, although they may still have a clear conceptualisation about the principal's leadership, its effect on them is less clear. The principal appears a distant figure, removed from their life in school and having little impact on it. The students' references in this code are more negative of his leadership and his contribution to their outcomes and school experience. This sample conveys a range of these views.

- “cos we don’t see him, we don’t know what he’s doing - he’s basically just this man in a shadow, so if you got rid of him the only thing we would notice is that he isn’t there.... “We don’t see him... we don’t see what the outcomes of his work are. Like you know, I don’t know what he’s done in the past year” (N4).
- “cos he just stands there and just doesn’t..... he just stands there in a suit and doesn’t do anything... you never see him” (N2);
- “I don’t think head teachers have a lot of input to be honest.... I don’t think they do much leading” (N2);
- “because he doesn’t talk to us that much we don’t have a clue what he does” (112);
- “well we don’t know what he does... what the law makes you do – what headteachers do behind their doors” (115).

There is a suggestion in comments like “we don’t see him”, and “you never see him” that they hold this view because he is not visible to these students, and that there exists a real distance between him and them. This is confirmed by Corinne who complains that “he doesn’t really take notice of the children at all” (C4) and Emma who “wouldn’t notice” (115) if he wasn’t there.

However, despite the clarity of opinion on whether it is important to have a principal and the effect of a principal, a number of students who expressed both strongly negative and strongly positive views also made an interesting observation about one of the useful functions a principal carries out: his leadership of teachers.

4.2.1.3. *The Teachers' Leader:*

Students are very aware of the role that the principal has with teachers and the relationship between them and the effect this can have on them as students. A number of students perceive that one of the functions of the principal's leadership of students is to act as a referee between teachers, who may be involved in a power struggle to fill the gap if there was no principal. This sentiment is expressed by these students:

- “*it sort of like settles disagreements between the teachers in a way.... Like they think – this should be done, that should be done and at the end of the day it's his decision*” (K4);
- “*it depends... if the main like... if the main characters in the school like Mr Green and Mr Black, say that like... yeah... like the biggest people... if they worked together then they could run the school quite well.... But if they were there – there'd be civil war*” (C1);
- “*because like Nathan said the rivalry and trying to get above*” (N6);
- “*they'd be working against each other and stuff*” (N1);
- “*keep the teachers in line*” (K3).

These comments about the relationship between the principal and teachers demonstrate a closely observed scrutiny of the micro political interactions of school. Nina sees the principal siding with teachers against students: “*I think he does go more for the teachers instead of us*” (N3); Nick makes the interesting observation that “*the teachers fear him as well... cos they completely change their teaching style when he comes into the room*” (N4), which is the opposite opinion of the girl who laments that “*Mr Black don't listen to him at all cos he shouldn't take my McKenzie jacket off me*” (B4).

4.2.2. Theme 4B: The Roles that Constitute Student Leadership

4.2.2.1. *Checking up*

The perception that the principal makes significant efforts to check up on students so that he can catch them breaking the rules is strong. These students comment that when they think of the principal they think of him as being “*around*” (B1), “*walking*” (B2), “*looking in classrooms*” (B4), “*looking at classrooms popping (his) head in*” (B2). It is clear that the purpose of this vigilance is perceived to be in order to catch them misbehaving or breaking the rules. Beth voices this sentiment in her description of how “*when he comes in he don't come in like a friendly thing – he comes in to check*” (B4); more vividly Carol describes how “*he walks into a room and skulks around*” (C1). Consequently Ben has formed the opinion that the main element of student leadership is “*having a go at teachers and students*” (B3). When asked “*when do you see the head leading students then?*” (Luke all groups), 25 students reflect this view to a greater or lesser extent. Nicole responds with “*I see him when he's shouting at people*” (N2). Nick agrees and adds dismissively, “*but that's it really*” (N4). The question does generate enthusiastic responses in some such as this from Kevin who is eager to express his opinion despite not having contributed much to previous discussions.

“Can I say my thing?” “It feels like he's just here.... He's here to punish the students.... And just like here to do the paperwork” (K3).

Katie suggests that “*he only comes out at break time and lunchtime to catch people out... like smoking and stuff*” (K4), and Ben that he sits “*looking at cameras like big brother*” (B3). Kyle believes “*he's only there when something has gone wrong or someone's done something*” (K1) and Ed only sees student leadership “*if you see kids misbehaving then he will lead them then... or if they're doing something right*” (112).

This view that principal leadership is apparent mainly when students are doing something wrong, misbehaving, is a commonly held perception. These comments express similar sentiments:

- “*he’s only there when something has gone wrong or someone’s done something*” (N2);
- “*yeah, telling people off...when he’s shouting at people*” (C4);
- “*having a go at teachers and students*” (113).

But it is in one particular area of misbehaviour or of breaking the rules that students identify principal leadership most clearly and that is when the principal is enforcing rules on school uniform. Kendall claims that “*the only time I ever see him is if he’s walking around telling people off for their uniform*” (K6).

Others point out that “*he does pick up on uniform*” (K1) and some have personal stories to tell about their uniform conversation experiences with the principal like Beth, Sara and Esther:

- “*..... yeah innit... cos when Mr Blue says you have to colour in the tick for Nike... it’s like what’s the point*” (B4)
- “*he’s good, but then he’s really annoying because... I’m not being harsh or anything...remember when it was really cold – it was like in the minuses – and ...I wore my coat and jumper and a hat and a scarf and he still told me to take my hat off and I didn’t even get in the school gate*” (72);
- “*they should notice you for the good stuff...but you shouldn’t have had a flesh tube...*” (114).

This final comment raises an important issue which is picked up and developed further later. The comment hints at the essence of what Esther feels the purpose of student leadership should be about: recognising and noticing students for things they do well rather than just keeping them in order and under control.

4.2.2.2 *Managing*

Another characteristic that forms part of student leadership for some students is that which can be described as the principal's managerial function. Kevin's comment above expressing his opinion that "*he's here to punish the students...and just like here to do the paperwork*" (K3), is not the only one which recognises a managerial characteristic of student leadership. Other students comment on the principal's managerial identity. Charles recognises that "*he's busy*" (C2); Ewan that "*he's got a lot to do... hasn't he*" (113) and Esther ponders that "*I think of him having meetings*" (114). Corinne and Crystal recognise the need for these managerial activities but indicate at the same time their view that they need to be balanced more with time spent with them:

- "*cos, I don't know... I think he's always busy and stuff and he should really take some time out and come and talk to us*" (C4);
- "*cos we all understand that he has to do meetings, but there's a certain extent where it gets a bit too much*" (C3);

Students appear to understand that these managerial activities have an effect on them and that they are part of the principal's leadership of students. When prompted "what is the single thing that affects you most?" (Luke Behaviour Group) Billy and Bridget are unequivocal in their response "*all the stuff that's gonna make the school look bigger and better*" (B1), "...*the money in school*" (B2). Natalie and Noah can see that "*he does try to get us the best facilities*" (N6) "*and like building work*" (N5) but not everyone thinks that the money is spent on the right things however. Nicole, for instance, expresses real frustration with what she sees as the principal's misdirected spending:

"but what like annoys me, is that he'll spend however much money or the school's money on building a new science block - but he won't sort out the toilets - which are just disgusting.... and it's.... I just find that stupid" (N2).

However, it is the principal's role in appointing new teachers that Steven and Ed see as being the most important activity amongst these managerial functions. Their comments indicate that they value and recognise the importance of the principal appointing good teachers for them:

- "*if he doesn't pick a good teacher then we're not going to get a good education*" (76);

- “*yeah, definitely, cos we’ve highlighted the fact that having a good personal relationship with the teachers is important and if you... if he hires a good teacher that you like, you’re gonna think I look forward to that lesson and think oh wicked I’ve got that teacher now – I like him, so I’m gonna work well*” (112).

4.2.2.3. Education

Whilst some students recognise the value to them of the principal appointing good teachers others see his leadership of them having direct educational consequences. The comments that indicate this express a view that the principal’s influence and leadership in this area is direct, very personal and can be accessed directly. Sally feels that the principal could help her if she had a problem with her work “*yeah, cos you don’t know what you should do so he helps you*” (74). Seb believes that the principal “*gets us our GCSEs*” (73) whilst Ben recognises his priority as “*education*” and as “*having top power and having the spare time – he’s not teaching... to like look up on all the attendance*” (B3). Ben continues that it would have to be the principal that takes responsibility for education as teachers would “*not be able to run the school*” neither does he think “*they’d be able to run the learning*” (B3).

Students also have a view of other direct influences by the principal on the curriculum. When asked their opinion of new vocational courses that had been brought into the curriculum Ewan, Elliot and Esther all agreed with Luke that these came about as the direct result of decisions by the principal (Luke Year 11 Focus Group). Similarly, the principal’s direct influence on aspects of school life such as uniform and accessories were recognised by Elliot and Eve. In an animated discussion about uniform Eve explains to the group that “*he does change the uniforms to the way we want them... and does make changes to what we want rather than the board of governors*” (116). Elliot supports this by adding “*yeah and bags...I don’t know if that was Mr Blue but I think Mr Blue does have a part in it*” (111). A final point in connection with how students perceive the influence of the principal as an educator emerges when students were asked how they would feel about him teaching them (Luke various

groups). All were unanimously in favour, with Kara expressing the general feeling in the comment that “*maybe Mr Blue could come in, cos he's probably good at one subject and instead of getting a sub in he could actually go in for that lesson*” (K5).

4.3. Summary

The key issues identified from the review of literature which were deemed most relevant to this sub question were:

- the *level* of any student leadership effect
- locating student leadership in the existing pantheon of variables of school and principal effectiveness
- the place of student leadership in theoretical models of school leadership
- students' perceptions of the way school leadership works.

When the findings are considered in light of these, two key issues emerge from the data. The first is that students have clear conceptualisations of student leadership. Theme 4A contains those broad conceptualisations, general descriptions which might be used heuristically to describe the principal's leadership and its main direction. The most striking of these is expressed as the perception that the principal is the man in charge, 'the man at the top'. His leadership is seen as hierarchical, with him sitting at the top of a pyramid of teachers carrying the power and weight of the title of leader. This notion of the principal's leadership reflects the commonly held *heroic* view of leadership which has been described in the literature for nearly a century (Hill 1928). This *common sense* perception of leadership from the students is interesting and surprising when most principal effectiveness research can describe school leadership in very different ways. There the focus appears to be on perspectives, dimensions, styles and approaches, for instance, Harris (2003), West Burnham (2009), and Leithwood (2010); and these, it would seem, are not conceptualisations that these students would recognise.

However, a different perspective is given by some students. This 'man in the shadow' conceptualisation conveying a perception that the role of principal has little significance for them might at first sight appear to be in opposition to that of

the ‘man at the top’. These seemingly contradictory findings raise significant interest and require some scrutiny. On closer examination it appears that students who express this view (12) (Table 4: 1) are those who have been categorised largely as ‘not known’ (6) and consequently by definition, may not be expected to recognise a significant student leadership, or they are Council students (2) and two Year 11 students who express views which clearly recognise a student leadership effect in other comments they make elsewhere. For instance Emma (115), who reports that no one would notice if the principal “*wasn’t there*” also comments that for concerts and performances “*he’s always on the front row centre left, to watch it all.*” These negative comments may also be another expression of the anger and unfairness felt by well behaved students at not being noticed which is expressed below. So whilst recognising this anomaly and the implications it brings, for consideration of the inclusivity of student leadership for the future, the coding theme is considered as a contextual subsidiary nuance within this section.

Another surprising finding within this theme is the idea that the principal’s leadership of students is connected with leading teachers and for many, making sure that the teachers are kept in order. This concept of the principal as leader of teachers has been well explored in the principal effectiveness literature (eg Blasé 1987, Evans 1997, Blasé 2001), where it is often viewed as the domain in which much of the principal’s indirect effect on student outcomes takes place. But this has not been explored from the view of the students and the idea that one of the principal’s functions in leading students is to ensure teachers are kept in order, do their jobs properly and treat students fairly and justly, is a significant emergent idea in the field.

The second finding which emerges is that students conceptualise student leadership mainly at a student, rather than a classroom or school level. Theme 4B codings in particular illustrate how students perceive the value of student leadership to be in the way that it affects them personally. Students describe student leadership in terms of the roles and functions that the principal has in student leadership and in some cases, the direct instrumental effect they

believe the principal to have. The strongest of these seems to be that of an authoritarian role in which the principal is preoccupied with maintaining the disciplinary climate through enforcing rules and checking up and punishing students. This may not be surprising and seems to be reflected in comments from students who have experienced this personally and directly. This inference of a direct effect on students would seem to be divergent in light of principal effectiveness research, which looks for variables mainly at an indirect, mediated level, such as the classroom.

Other thematic sub codings which emerge also appear to confirm that some students perceive the principal to have a directly instrumental role in their achievement and school experience. These are those described as 'managing' and 'education'. This is an interesting observation in light of literature that would place both of these functions as 'task oriented' leadership (Humphrey 200) or 'managerial' leadership (Bush 2008) rather than as aspects of a more personal and direct nature.

Chapter 4 findings provide an insight into students' broad conceptualisations of the principal's leadership of students and of their concept of leadership generally. Chapter 5 attempts to explore these conceptualisations further by seeking illumination from the students of what elements they perceive make up or are characteristic features within these conceptualisations.

Chapter 5

Perceptions of the Characteristics of the Principal's Student Leadership

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the themes that emerge from the student comments which refer to elements of their experience with the principal that they perceive as being characteristic of his student leadership. These comments were made by the focus group participants in answer to question prompts which asked questions about their overall perceptions of the principal's student leadership and then, more particularly, questions about the detail of what and where.

Students have a wealth of fruitful observations about their perceptions of the characteristics of the principal's student leadership. Within this section the student comments have been coded into four themes: These are:

Theme 5A: Personal Characteristics; Physical. This is a theme which brings together references which demonstrate how students connect the personal characteristics and manner of the principal with his student leadership. To make clearer what exactly it is that seems to be affecting students, these characteristics are grouped together in three sections: these are the characteristics of 'appearance', 'demeanour' and 'voice'.

Theme 5B: Personal Characteristics; Traits. These are the personal qualities (*traits or attributes*) that are identified by students as significant and prominent in the principal's leadership. They are different from his physical characteristics but can be connected to them. A good example of this connection, for instance, is the way that use of voice (physical) can be a determinant of calmness or pleasantness (traits). The references have been coded under the headings of 'Calmness', 'Approachability', and 'Pleasantness'.

Theme 5C: Behaviours. These are reifications of attributes and traits, the physical demonstrations and behaviours that students see and mostly want to see more of. These are actions that can be actively pursued by the principal. Students see these characteristics manifested in the way they are treated and

form their opinion of principal leadership from them. They are listed as codes and include ‘listening’; ‘fairness’; ‘being independent of teachers’; ‘leniency’; ‘praising’; ‘getting involved with students’; and ‘involving students’. These are qualities associated with having a human touch.

Theme 5D: Presence. This theme identifies the characteristic of presence: the idea that being there and being seen is an important feature of student leadership. Whether they like seeing the principal or not, they notice when he is there and for some, more importantly, they notice when he is not there even more. He is listed as being seen in various places including assemblies; his office; at music or drama events; on the gates, before and after school; around the place at lunch and break times in various locations; in the corridors, and most noticed of all when he comes into the classroom.

Table 5:1 lists the 4 themes and their associated codes, the number of students and the number of references that have been coded to each. A brief description of the codes is also included.

Theme 5A : Personal Characteristics- Physical			
Code	Coding criteria	Students	References
Appearance	Comments that indicate students notice the principal’s appearance and attach meaning to what he wears or looks like	17	20
Demeanour	Comments that show students are aware of the effects on them of the <i>physical</i> attitude, bearing and dominant characteristics of the principal	8	11
Voice	Comments that mention the principal’s voice and comments that mention how shouting affects them	23	27
Theme 5B: Personal Characteristics- Traits			
Calmness	Comments by students indicating that they respond to calmness and	9	12

	a relaxed manner		
Approachability	Comments indicating that students value communication and a principal who is easy to approach and talk to	11	18
Pleasantness	Comments from students who think that humour, niceness, and being genuine are important	11	16
Theme 5C: Behaviours			
Listening	Comments indicating that students value being listened to	10	10
Fairness	Comments indicating that students value fair treatment for themselves and for others from the principal and teachers	35	76
Independent from teachers	Comments demonstrating that students want the principal to judge them for himself and not just listen to what teachers say	6	11
Leniency	Comments about the effects of the principal being reasonable, understanding, flexible and lenient and examples of where this has not happened	12	16
Praising	Comments showing that students value being praised, or that they are not praised enough	10	11
Getting involved with students	Comments that relate to the desire for the principal to be involved and interact more with students or those indicating the feeling that he is not involved with students enough	8	8
Involving students	Comments reflecting students wish to be involved in decision making or comments that suggest that they have or have not been involved	9	14

Theme 5D: Presence			
Assemblies	Comments indicating that the principal is seen delivering assemblies or is present in other assemblies	6	7
Classrooms	Comments that recount instances of the principal in classrooms or other comments that associate the principal with classrooms	10	12
Corridors	Comments that refer to the principal's corridor encounters with students	4	5
School Performances	Comments describing the principal's presence at sport, music and drama performances	5	6
Canteen	Comments referring to times that the principal is seen in the canteen at break or lunchtime	4	7
On the gate		4	5
His Office		2	3

Table 5:1: The characteristics of student leadership: thematic framework

5.2. Theme 5A: Physical Characteristics

5.2.1. Appearance

Perhaps prompted by the word ‘seeing’ students respond to the question: “okay.... so do you think that your experiences of seeing Mr Blue are good or bad?” by describing how the principal’s physical attributes affect them. These behaviour group students certainly notice his appearance. Four students mention that “he’s very smart” (B3), and “well-dressed” (B1) whilst Beth and Belle have noticed “his bright pink shirt,” (B4 and B5). Students in other groups when asked a similar question go further and describe the effect of this smart

appearance. Nick suggests that it carries a reassuring message of “*smart person... Knows what he's doing*” (N1) with Kevin feeling that it makes him being “*...easier to respect*” (K3). In particular, wearing a suit seems to provoke a mixed reaction. Carol, for instance, feels it is a barrier between her and the principal:

“I mean if you (Luke) stand next to him and you have the option to talk to one of you two... he's in his suit and you're just in that – I'd go and talk to you more... cos I don't wanna talk to a man in a suit...” (C1).

Nick, again, thinks that the suit “*can be quite intimidating for like the younger kids I think*” (N1) whilst Kevin conveys the general feeling that “*... it's like a shield... stiff, sort of*” and gives a message “*I'm going to talk down to you child...*” (K3). When asked to develop the idea of the suit making a difference Nick adds a comment which introduces the concept of authority:

“I think he needs it though. I think if he didn't have it he wouldn't have the authority that he does have” (N1).

The concept of authority appears to be a strong aspect of how students perceive student leadership. But this comment is the only instance of a student associating authority with appearance. The connection seems to be that authority is conveyed by formality, an idea echoed by Beth who suggests that a less formal appearance would give a completely different message to students. She feels that the suit makes a difference “*subconsciously*” and that “*if he didn't have the jacket on and the tie... he'd look a bit more laid back and approachable*” (B4). This thought is echoed by Corinne who contrasts the appearance of the principal with that of her primary headteacher who “*didn't wear a tie cos he didn't feel that he needed to... and he'd.... really like be at one with the kids really...*” Corinne continues with this and explains that the reason why the principal “*dresses up all smart for us... is...cos he presents stuff*” but finishes with the opinion that it is not worth his while because “*no-one takes notice of him*” (C3).

5.2.2. Demeanour

Whilst some students notice what the principal is wearing and the effect this has, and seem to indicate that less formal dress might make a difference to his leadership of students, others make observations about the nature and effect of his demeanour and physical presence: attributes that seem closely connected. Perhaps understandably, these, smaller year 7 students, mention the size of the principal and for someone of 5' 8" it is unusual to be referred to in this light. In describing his unease around the principal Steven explains that "*it's cos he's tall and looks over me...*" (76), and again later that "*it's cos he comes to you and bears down on you...*" Seb agrees, reminding the group that "*some people's headteachers don't do that... some of them like kneel down and tell you what's happening, but he just is above you*" (73).

This feeling of being physically overwhelmed is suggested similarly in these comments which indicate a different but related quality: arrogance. These students describe a kind of *physical* arrogance which is summed up by Scott, a year 7. He tells how "*it's the way he walks around the school looking... I'm the best*" (75). Nicole uses the word "*saunter*" (N2) to describe the way the principal moves, with its connotations of arrogant insouciance and for Seb it is "*because he just walks... like when I see him he just walks like controlling and big-headed*" (73). And Elliot, a Year 11, less likely to feel physically overwhelmed, complains that "*he doesn't get down to the students' level and I think he kinda does think he's superior and he is cos he's headteacher, but I think that when he comes and talks to students he could come down and talk to them more like their own level* (111).

Other comments indicate that students perceive arrogance of a different kind. This is the kind that is interpreted by the students as the principal seeking personal glory. These comments refer to occasions when the principal makes speeches at the end of shows or appears in pictures in the paper or the college newsletter. Nicole feels that "*it's a bit like he's claiming all the glory - kinda of like, yeah this is my school kinda thing*" (N2). Noah goes further claiming that,

“he like takes all the credit” (N5) and feels that the real reason for the principal’s speeches and recognition is so that he can gather all the trophies for himself:

“yeah, we get loads of awards and he wants the rewards and well, we never seen him and we end up giving all the trophies to his cupboard...nearly all of them go up to him” (N5).

Luke is certain there was no ironic intonation or suggestion when this comment was made, and this idea of students completely misinterpreting the principal’s intentions in several of his actions, is a recurrent idea. It is a surprising insight and provocative reminder of how actions (praise) made with good intentions and which are designed to promote positive student leadership, can be misinterpreted completely.

5.2.3. Voice

The third of the physical characteristics that emerge as significant to students is the principal’s voice and the effect this has on them. There are a significant number of comments across all groups which refer to the loud voice of the principal and the general dislike of being shouted at or hearing the principal shout. For instance, Seb, a year 7, perhaps still reflecting on the size of the principal or his position uses “*controlling*” to describe the voice. He explains that “*sometimes he’s... sometimes when you walk up to him, he’s so like up high and his voice is so controlling that you think – I can’t ask him something cos he’ll tell me to go order something*”(73). Steven provides another description that conveys the weight and power of the voice and believes that students listen to the principal “*because he has that voice that you have to listen to – kinda scary but not scary*” (76). Carol just finds him “*generally quite loud*” (C1) but Steven’s comment hints that it is loudness along with something else that makes students listen. In response to Luke’s question asking whether a student would listen to the principal Steven answers:

“If he said it like that no one would listen, but if he said it in the voice” (76).

It is this use of the definite article that conveys the extra quality which the student later agrees is “*commanding*” when prompted by Luke. An indirect reference to loudness is made by Belle who makes a plea for the principal “*to*

have a more softer voice" (B5). This last comment is interesting as it follows a passionate account of the effect the voice of the principal has on this student. She describes her growing frustration in vivid terms:

"cos when you're sat there right... say you was sat here and telling me what to do, telling me what to do... I'm like this right and I'd be like – alright – and then you keep going on and I'd be like – oh for fuck's sake chill out – and it's like and (he) sees your face and he's like 'what' and then you kick off" (B5).

But it is the voice when it is shouting that has the greatest effect and which provokes the most comment from students. For a significant number the principal shouting is one of the defining characteristics of his student leadership. Several mention that he is seen shouting or that he has shouted at them. Emma claims that she "*has seen him shout loads at my science group*" (115); these Council students confirm this with Corinne noting that "*whenever we see him he's shouting*" (C3) and Connor reflecting that "*it does seem like he shouts all the time*" (C5). Nina describes the principal as "*one big guy at the top that just shouts the odds*" (N3). Interestingly, she is using this negative interpretation of shouting as confirmation of her main point which is that it feels like the principal against everyone else. She implies that it shouldn't feel like this and comments that "*we're supposed to be like a community and it just feels like there's just a load of us and then him*" (N3). However, although shouting is identified as an important characteristic of the principal, not everyone feels the same. Nathan wants his group to know that "*I don't see him shout that much*" (N3); this may be because he as a *Not Known* student has seen less of the principal, but equally Beth, a behaviour student, who would have seen lots of him, is able to proudly state that she "*has never been told off by him*" (B4).

Nevertheless, there is a strong feeling against shouting generally and not only that of shouting by the principal: none seem to have a good word to say for it, although Elliot can see a place for it when "*as a last resort shouting can be used but not ... when someone's been told off straight away*" (111). Students describe the powerful effect of being shouted at and the negative feelings it can arouse. Belle describes how she "*hates getting shouted at... it makes me proper angry*" (B5) whilst Beth tells how being shouted at causes her to "*shout*

back at them... I always shout back" (B4). Corinne feels that shouting "doesn't set a good example" (C3) whilst Carol describes that it makes her feel "scared watching them" (C1), when others are getting shouted at. A thoughtful comment is added by Kieran who explains that is not the fact of being told off that is annoying, "*it's just the way they talk to me about it*" (K2), whilst Emma points out that the principal "*doesn't shout... cos a lot of teachers shout about everything and it doesn't gain respect it just makes you want to annoy them more*" (115).

5.3 Theme 5B: Personal Characteristics; Traits.

5.3.1. Calmness

What is interpreted here and described as calmness is that quality that makes students be at ease with the principal. It makes them feel as if he is approachable. Being calm and relaxed is important to a wide range of students and is mentioned by students in five focus groups. In particular, older students mention it most often and they see it as a quality of a more adult relationship. This selection of references expresses the range of its meaning to students. They want the principal to be "*laid back,*" (B2), to have "*a relaxed presence*" (C1) and to create a "*relaxed atmosphere*" (C1), or to be "*just more relaxed*" (N2) and to be "*not running around like a headless chicken*" (C2). Elliot and Ed, two Year 11s are more specific. In a light hearted exchange one suggests that "*I don't actually think he should make more of an effort, he should just chill out I think and actually just relax a bit around students*" (112) to which his friend adds:

"he should chill out more about stuff like that – cos he'll just say where are your trainers – instead of like... howdy, how's it going... and then just say why are you wearing trainers... he should just be a bit more of a chilled-out rasta man I think....Just grow a beard and be a bit more like embracing" (111).

Two other comments expand the idea further. Sara recognises that being calm and relaxed is OK up to a point but that it would be unwise to be too relaxed as "*you still have the ground rules as the same*" (72). Carol makes a similar point

recognising the opposite, but in her opinion, positive and necessary qualities that make the principal “*forceful but relaxed*” (C1).

5.3.2. Approachability

Approachability has been treated separately as a concept although the word is only used on three occasions by two students, Esther and Nick (114, N4). It describes a quality they see and which is considered desirable for good student leadership. However, the sentiment of approachability, as it appears in other concepts such as communication and connection is more common. Ewan explains this difficulty in separating the two ideas:

“communication and approachability are kinda like the same thing though, cos if he’s approachable he’s obviously easy to communicate with” (113).

Communication is also the word used by Kieran and Kevin to describe this quality of approachability (K2, K3). Both Noah and Nina talk about the need for “*connection*” (N5), and “*connection with the students, yeah...he should just have that natural connection with students*” (N3). Ed sees it as important to have “*someone that like goes to your level*” (112), and Nicole someone who is “*down to earth*” (N2). This would make him “*seem more like a person*” according to Katie (K4). In these descriptions students are giving a clear description of a principal who, in Nicole’s words is “*comfortable with like the students... so you can feel like you can talk to him*” (N2). They are requesting someone who creates a sense of ease and comfort “*so you’re comfortable and they’re approachable*” (113).

5.3.3. Pleasantness

But it is not only approachability that is welcomed. Students identify other attributes that are commonly associated with the concept of pleasantness. These include a sense of humour, niceness, friendliness and reliability. For instance, these Year 7 students, Sam and Scott, would like the principal to be

“fun” (75) and “funny” (71) or someone who “jokes about” (74), and is “a *jokey person who makes a joke out of things*” (73). Students also say they want a principal who is nice: six use the word *nice* or *niceness* to describe the quality they would like him to display; five others use the words *friendly* or *friendliness* and two choose *reliable*.

So students seem to want the principal to be nice and approachable, not shout at them, wear less formal clothing and not be arrogant or overbearing. What they do not want is well captured by this comment from Steven. Their nadir according to him is someone who is “*never smiling, never saying hello, spending his time...miserable... spending his whole time in his office... always wearing a suit*” (76). A useful and very perceptive final comment in this section is made by Seb who has spotted something that others have not:

“I think he should take away his act and make it more friendly and that” (73).

5.4 Theme 5C: Behaviours

5.4.1 *Listening*

Being listened to is seen as a valuable and desirable element of student leadership. Belle highlights this as being the most important quality of good student leadership. She wants “*someone that understands ya and listens to ya ...a good listener*” (B5). Natalie agrees and adds “*and maybe listen to our views and what teachers we think are good*” (N6). Eve wants a principal who “*listens to what you say*” (116), whilst Kyle, powerfully, describes the positive effect that being listened to had on him. He relates the story of an interchange with the principal, who after initially shouting at him listened to his side of the story:

“I’ve gotta say though when I got excluded for having an incident with him... he did take me back into his office when I got re-admitted and he asked me what he thinks he should have done differently and I did differently...cos he thought that...like when he started shouting at me that’s when I got more annoyed with him.... cos he wouldn’t just talk to me about it... he just started shouting and I got more annoyed about it” (K1).

For Elliot, Ed and Emma, three Year 11 students, being listened to is very important:

- “*it shouldn’t be like, that we’re performing for him or something, because in a way a school should be a democracy so it isn’t all for him*” (111);
- “*he should hear our opinions*” (114);
- “*like have a debate about an issue and he gives his point across about why he wants to do something...*” (112).

They want to be heard and they want the principal to actively seek their views; someone who in the words of Ewan acts “*like a democratic leader like - they value the opinions of others – like other teachers or students, by like doing a survey or something*” (113).

But being listened to is not the most valuable element of student leadership in the eyes of students. The most commented upon quality is the ability of the principal, and others, to demonstrate fairness.

5.4.2. Fairness

This is a complex but important concept to students. It is by far and away the most talked about aspect of the principal’s student leadership, with every student making a comment about it and it receiving double the number of references of any other code. It emerges in various contexts; students mention a wish to be respected, treated with impartiality, and to witness consistency of punishments and independence from teachers. The interpretations of this ‘fairness’ coding are more nuanced than most others and the variations of its application differ more than any other between groups of students. Students of all ages, gender and attitude are vociferous in their demand that everyone be treated fairly.

Bridget sums up the feelings of many when she describes a bad principal as one who “*takes other people’s sides*” (B2). A good principal “*takes both sides*” (B3), is “*impartial*” and “*keeps the same punishment*” (N5). To Nick (N4), Brad (B6) and Beth (B4) he is “*fair*” which reassures Beth that she knows “*we’re not*

the only ones" (B4). Students expect a consistency of punishment and punishment that fits the crime so that "*the consequences have to be fair and not like too extreme or too soft*" (B2). They dislike "*stuff like discrimination and favouritism*" (K3) and think it unfair "*if you do something like bad, like one thing bad, he brings up all the other bad things, but he won't bring up all the good things you've done*" (K2). Like Kyle they are happy with "*fair but strict*" (K1) but look out for the whimsical punishments of a vindictive principal who "*could like pick on a student if he doesn't like them... obviously cos that wouldn't be nice... like if they did – say they were caught with a mobile phone and he gave them like exclusion for a week and then another kid smashed a window with a football on purpose or whatever or stole something and then he gave them like a day exclusion – just cos he didn't like the other*" (113).

For some students the fairness issue is extremely prominent in their school life and from the number of quoted references above it can be seen that for behaviour students it is an issue especially close to their hearts. These students are able to cite many examples of what they consider to be unfair rules and practices whilst non behaviour students speak passionately about the unfairness of the bad students getting all the attention! Incidents of unfairness range from teachers not having to wear uniform and being allowed to have dyed hair and false nails whereas they get told off for having these things, to general gripes about uniform and being told off for not wearing uniform. These three examples of comments from Beth, Bridget, and Belle are typical of the issues brought up by the behaviour students:

- "*like all the adults are allowed all these piercings and false nails and earrings and that and we ain't so it's... really they should not be allowed to wear that stuff as well*" (B4)
- "*basically it feels like we've been treated really different... but in a way the teachers are like being really like... treated really nicely and that lot... even though like*" (B2)
- "*yeah... y' know...if he shouts why can't we shout...y' know*" (B5).

The comment above which refers to an incident with the principal and other examples of similar occasions, in which students felt unfairly treated, make clearer how some students interpret the principal's interventions with them. His interpretation of rules and punishments is seen as inconsistent and unfair by some. These students really view these actions as harsh and irrational, seeing them as arbitrary and unjust. Seb describes this interaction with the principal over uniform from this perspective:

"cos it was a black hat and it was really cold it was when it was snowy and it was before he even crossed the road to get into school – Mr Blue pulled it off and said don't let me see it again..." (73).

Steven, helpfully, confirms the unfairness for Seb by recounting an incident he witnessed:

"she was wearing an Anytown Swimming Club one and he just came in and said keep it on and sometimes he lets people do that and doesn't let other people... so I think if he's gonna make a rule he needs to say it to everyone." (76).

Along similar lines is the complaint that the principal and others are perceived to make judgements about them and their behaviours because of their association with older siblings. This causes extreme agitation and is viewed as being unfair by Beth, Brad and Sam who have experienced this treatment:

- "*no, but sometimes like your head of years and stuff can judge you by your family – like your older brothers and stuff and judge you by them... like say they were really naughty*" (B4);
- "*..thinks that the older kids at the school were really, really naughty and the younger ones think they're gonna be the same so they treat them differently... so they think oh I know what they'll be like so I'll start being strict towards them*" (71);
- "*sometimes they bring up your family involvement as well and try and compare you with them*" (B6).

The interpretations of how fairly or not they are treated vary greatly between focus groups. Some students from the Behaviour focus group perceive their treatment to be harsher than most because of their already known reputation.

Belle describes how she feels it works in the mind of the principal when an incident is reported to him; she asks the group to consider this:

“...just say you have a bad rep already... and like all of a sudden he hears your name and he'll be like – oh yeah, its bleep... so it's obvious that they've” (B5).

This might seem to be an obvious assumption but on another level she has analysed what she considers to be a deeper and more sophisticated reality. She continues with the recognition that *“if you're good all the time yeah... they don't notice it, but if you're bad and you're doing quite well they notice it more...they notice more and they praise more”* (B5). But at an even deeper level a darker and disappointing reality has been made apparent to Billy who has found that *“when you like try and be good – yeah – you don't get noticed... so you think... fuck it... I'll just fucking mess around”* (B1).

Students identified as having a positive attitude and not being known for poor behaviour, those members of the college Council focus group, are also vociferous on another aspect of fairness. However, their perspective on this differs from the behaviour students who point out how unfairly treated they feel because of their reputation. The Council group's interpretation of this is that *they* are unfairly treated because of all the attention given to the behaviour students. This sentiment is expressed in comments such as these from Charles and Connor:

“yeah we're in the middle... verging off the middle... it's just like – what's the point in being good if you don't get noticed.... all the bad people get noticed so what's the point in...” (C2);

and

“it probably makes me think...oh I'm not good enough to be in the high ones, so why don't I act really, really bad and get...” (C5).

A similar but more sophisticated and nuanced interpretation of this perspective on fairness is expressed by Kendall. She believes that when normally good students do something wrong they get treated even more harshly than already identified behaviour students. She contrasts the treatment she would receive from the principal with that her friend, a less compliant student, would receive:

"yeah, but then again if you went to him and you were like... I dunno.... you'd done something really bad and you went to him... he'd be like more flexible with you than like if I went to him and I'd done exactly the same thing cos Kieran is like known for not being, like, as well behaved....If I went to him I get more of a harsh punishment" (K6).

From a slightly different but related perspective Nathan expresses another sentiment apparent amongst students with good behaviour. This is their interpretation of the extra interventions and attention that behaviour students receive with the intention of remediating their poor behaviour. His perception of these however is very different. He sees bad behaviour being rewarded and good behaviour, in the form of hard work, being ignored. This is viewed as being treated unfairly. In a long but illustrative intervention he recounts a story about his sister:

"my sister's gone to all these... you know New Opportunities (name) and stuff and she's going on... every Friday or something she gets to go on a trip - so paintball, Water park (name) - so she's getting rewarded for bad behaviour and y' know, we're in school working really, really hard - but we're not getting anything out of it except from y' know - our GCSEs. And we don't even get a pat on the back from sir - saying oh well done or you know, you've done well in this or you know - we go home and think - school tomorrow, not looking forward to it" (N1).

These Year 7 students are also concerned that those with poor behaviour get more attention than the students who behave well. They express strongly their view that this is not only unfair but that it can be demotivating for the good students. Seb sees the principal "*always trying to sort out their problems – what they're doing, where they're doing it – that sort of thing... but I think he should be more... taking notice of the good children rather than the naughty children and have like.... Maybe the deputy head should sort out all the naughty ones and he should be praising all the good children*" (73). This thought is echoed by Eve who thinks "*the students that get noticed are the ones that aren't behaved and they get known, whereas the good students don't get recognised*" (116). Steven believes that "*the bad kids shouldn't really get much attention*" (76), while Sara offers the advice that "*if he paid more attention to the good people and praised the good people I think that everyone would try better*" (72)

Some students even interpret the bad behaviour of students as being designed purposefully to seek the attention of the principal. Nicole, for instance, thinks that “*they just wanna be a part of you know... they wanna know him and be able to see him if he's outside of school and just y' know... say hello to Mr Blue*” (N2). Noah and Natalie agree in response suggesting that “*that's really what they want, they want the attention...*” (N5) and “*that's why people try and be naughty cos they want a bit of.... attention*” (N6).

5.4.3. Being Independent of Teachers

Another characteristic of student leadership that is seen by students and worthy of comment by them is the ability of the principal to be independent of teachers. They are describing a role for him as an arbiter in disputes between students and teachers. This quality is linked to ‘Fairness’ described above and it is a request for the principal to listen to students as well as teachers and make fair decisions based on evidence, not blind support of teaching staff. This is an unexpected finding but clearly stated by these students representing a cross section of participants. Ben, for instance thinks that principals “*should be fair they shouldn't just take sides*” (B3) whilst Kevin describes an incident “*where I've been punished and I don't think it's fair and I've want to speak to Mr Blue cos he's like the boss...but sometimes you want him to solve the problem.... cos you think unfair, but you wanna speak to the boss*” (K3). A similar sentiment is expressed by Sally who points out that “*if you don't have a nice teacher you can go to someone else – not just another teacher who will probably tell them*” (74) and by Steven who reminds the group that “*some of the teachers are like really stricter than like the headteacher, so we need someone to like teach them... cos they might not have like a child*” (76).

5.4.4. Leniency

As well as being an arbiter who is seen by students as being independent of teachers, students also want to see reasonableness, clemency and leniency

shown in his involvement with students. This characteristic is seen by Nick as an act of real leadership of students; in his comment he appears to be describing a form of paternalistic guidance which is apparent in an approach which is “*flexible... kinda like he doesn’t just have one path and saying yeah I’m gonna go straight down here and whoever’s doing something wrong I’m gonna tell ‘em off and that’s all that I’ll do, you can kinda say, instead of telling them off I’m gonna lead them the right way so they’re not always like that*”(N4). These students too, would too seem to appreciate a similar approach based on rationality, evidence and respect. When judging their behaviours Ed requests that “*he should be more lenient,*”(112), Sara that he “*show forgiveness*” (72) and Emma “*an understanding why you did something*” (115). These two offer some advice however, with Steven believing that he could be “*really smart not likeand let us off a little bit*” (76) and Ewan suggesting that above all he could “*listen to your side of the story*” (113).

A similar feeling is expressed at length but within an interesting context by Nicole. She describes what appears to be a personal experience when the principal became involved in an incident that he comes across, and launches into, without knowing the full facts and without taking into account the wider circumstances and context of previous behaviour:

“yeah, like when he’s walking down the corridor and that, and if somebody’s been sent out or something and he’ll just like, he’ll ask you why your there and you’ll say and he doesn’t understand the circumstances - I know it’s cos he’s not been in the class, but if he had more interaction with the students - like cos some kids - like he’d understand that’s not, they don’t do, you know, that’s not the type of thing they do normally - they don’t misbehave normally - if they like take it into consideration, like know that they’re not constantly misbehaving and that he doesn’t have to have a go at them, but like normally he’ll just walk down and have a go at you cos you’re standing outside” (N2).

5.4.5. Praising

Another of these characteristics, these traits in action, that students say they value is ‘*praising*’. There is a clear indication from their comments that students find this motivating and that it has a positive effect on their perception of student

leadership. Eve believes it “encourages” (116); Elliot that it would “push you on” (111) and Ed that it would make you feel “*like sweet – my effort has been appreciated*” (112). Those who have not experienced praise from the principal find it worthy of mention such as Kara who tells her Focus Group that “*I’ve never been praised.*” (K5) and Kieran from the same group who indicates that if he were to be praised he would “*just be shocked more than anything*” (K2). Students make a distinction between the *personal* nature of the praise being described here with that of the more public praise given after performances. For Kyle, that kind of praise doesn’t count or mean the same: he describes this as being “*outside of school again - he’s only praising, it seems like he’s only praising things that are quite big*” (K1). For him praise is an important quantity “*because if I’ve been bad it’s been noticed and I’ve got excluded for it, then if I do something good after that – he’ll praise me for it cos he knows that I’ve done well and I’m trying hard*” (K1).

5.4.6. Involvement

The next code that emerged as a trait in action was that which contains comments about the principal’s interactions with students. Other codes have indicated that students are aware of the principal’s presence, traits and behaviours but these comments express a wish for him to be directly involved with them and not to be a distant figure and for him to directly involve them more. Generally, students who express an opinion feel like Natalie and Nathan that he is “*interactive*” (N6), “*positive*” (N1) or like Crystal and Carol that he is “*getting involved with the students*” (C4, C1). Nick also endorses the view that interaction is desirable. When replying to a question about the kind of principal he would like he describes “*somebody that actually pays attention to the students.... that spends time with them... not just random assemblies and then sits in their office*” (N4). To Carol however, this interaction proves only one thing:

“at least he’s showing us he’s actually there rather than playing with his paper sharpener or like folders in his office” (C1).

At the same time as wanting him to be involved and to interact more with them, students' comments suggest that they want him to involve them more in decisions that are taken. Charles feels that as a Council representative he has had little input into decisions that have been made in the school. He comments that he has "*not really*" (C2) been involved and perhaps feels like Nathan that "*nothing's gonna be done*" (N1). Elliot quotes the example of how the principal has been "*demolishing buildings or something without even consulting anybody and kinda not asking students*" (111) and Ewan expresses a wish that he could be "*like a democratic leader like - they value the opinions of others – like other teachers or students, by like doing a survey or something*" (113). Ed, however, is more realistic suggesting that students could "*have a debate about an issue and he gives his point across about why he wants to do something*" (112) whilst Emma, as always, gives what is probably a more pragmatic and realistic view:

"he should ask, just to see what we think and then go on his best judgement – for what's best for us" (115).

5.5 Theme 5D: Presence.

5.5.1. *The Classroom*

Many students comment on seeing the principal in classrooms or like Beth when he is "*looking in classrooms*" (B4). This behaviour is generally interpreted as checking up on both teachers and students. This is viewed both as a "good thing" by Steven and a "bad" thing by Sally who points out that "*when he comes in he don't come in like a friendly thing – he comes in to check*" (74). However, these visits are interpreted by Sam as intended to "*get us to work better*" (71), by Ben "*to see a new teacher...*" (B2) and by Scott just to watch:

"he came into our history lesson once...just stood there and wrote loads of things and just watched us" (72).

Scott's comment hints at an affective response to the principal's presence: Ewan too describes how he feels when the principal walks into his classroom. He describes first his feelings of anxiousness in case he has done something wrong and then goes on to put forward his opinion that it wouldn't matter how

often the principal did go into his classroom, he would never have as a close a relationship with him as with his teacher:

"cos you're just like used to seeing the normal teacher every week, so you think... I've got that lesson and you see them really often.... Cos he pops in... like he's been in some of my lessons before and you're kinda like a bit whoa... and you don't know what's happening, you think you've done something wrong or something's happened.... But yeah if he did come in like way more often, you wouldn't get as close as your normal teachers though... because he's kinda of not teaching you, he's just sat there listening like..." (113).

5.5.2. *The corridor*

Another location that is perceived by students to be a significant place where contacts with the principal occur is in the corridor. By their nature these interactions are random and unplanned but they seem to provoke comment and are memorable for students. Perhaps because the corridor is the place where students might be standing if they have been sent out of a classroom, the corridor encounter seems to have a meaning more than that which is first apparent. Noah complains that the principal "*has a go just cos you're standing outside*" (N5); Nick describes how the principal "*roams around the corridor*" (N4) while Nathan observes that "*you only ever see him when he's doing the walk down the corridor with his glasses on his head*" (N1). In describing it as *the walk* Nathan conveys this sense of an additional and more purposeful, perhaps even menacing meaning to what is otherwise a very straightforward activity; the implication is that *the walk* has an intentional purpose which has the feeling of being related to checking up. A similar, intentional connotation is felt in Nicole's use of the word *saunter* in this comment describing another corridor encounter: "*when he saunters pass we all just like talk about him*" (N2). However, not all corridor meetings are suffused with suspicion; the corridor can also provide opportunities for more positive encounters such as this that Sam describes to his group:

"the other day I was with my friend and he was eating in the corridor and he came up and like put his arms around us and said – you might be nearly Year 8, but you still can't eat in the corridor" (71).

5.5.3. Performances

The other location that prompts students to comment is when the principal is seen at students' public music or drama performances. His presence there seems to be carefully monitored by students such as Emma who notes his exact position in the audience "*always on the front row centre left, to watch it all*" (115). His motive for being there is generally interpreted positively and he is seen to be offering support to students who are taking part "...*like if we have a group for public speaking or anything like that he goes and gives us support*"(115). His actions are viewed positively by Nina and Natalie who comment that "*it's like quite good when at the end of a play he says well done to the students*" (N3), "*and afterwards he'll come up and say congratulations*" (N6). But at the same time there is a negative reaction on the occasions when he is not there; this absence is interpreted by Nicole as him not caring.

"yeah, and also when we have like our plays and concerts and stuff they save him a seat at the front and he doesn't always show up for it, so it's a bit kinda of like ...he doesn't care"(N1).

5.5.5. Other locations

The other locations where students say they encounter the principal include the canteen, his office, and the gate after school. These do not seem to prompt stories or memories just observations that he is there. In itself this seems interesting as the principal's intent in being present on the gate after school and eating in the canteen, is to provide opportunities for students to speak with him and for interactions to take place. Bridget mentions seeing him "*eating food*" (B2), and Natalie "*going to the canteen*" (N6). Nathan hints at a loneliness and isolated presence when he comments on seeing him "*going to the canteen to get his lunch and you know, sit there and be the last one there and then go back into his office.*" (N1). Others notice the principal "*at the main gates after school*" (K6) or "*always on the lawn*" (B5) or "*in his office*" (K5, 116).

This characteristic of presence or being there seems significant and students have a story to tell of seeing or interacting with the principal at a particular occasion or location. It may be worth exploring those locations which are unexpectedly not mentioned such as sports fixtures and presentations to

parents and students such as progress evenings or Review days, which may have been thought beforehand to be more significant. The informal and unplanned interactions in the corridor along with classroom and assembly occasions are those that are most prominently remembered, and may be the occasions that students would describe as student leadership events or incidents.

5.6. Summary

It appears that students have an expansive view of the characteristics of principal leadership. They have an understanding that there are technical aspects involved in the role, such as developing and acquiring new buildings and teachers, and communication responsibilities such as being the ‘public face’, but the data suggests that students mainly perceive principal leadership to be located in the immediate actions and personal characteristics of the principal. When considered in light of descriptions of principal leadership behaviours that appear in the literature reviewed above, as ‘transformational’, ‘instructional’ or ‘moral’, to name but three examples, or define leadership as ‘task oriented’ or ‘technical/rational’, three main findings emerge.

The first, is that students emphasise physical characteristics like demeanour, voice, appearance, and personality traits such as calmness, approachability and pleasantness, above all else. For them, these are the key elements of a principal’s student leadership. These findings support those of Moos et al (1998:41) which found that secondary students wanted to know more about the personality of headteachers than their competencies or technical ability. These findings also seem of relevance to the long standing debate in research that highlights the relative importance of leaders’ traits, for instance, Hill (1928), Stodgill (1974), and House et al (2004) in Northouse (2009).

The second finding is that the emotional traits highlighted in Table 5:1 are reminiscent of those emotionally intelligent qualities identified by Salovey and

Mayer (1990) and Goleman (1995). These are qualities that build relationships and develop trust; both concepts which are identified in the literature reviewed above, as significant aspects of successful school leadership. Students observe these qualities in the day to day actions of the principal and perceive them to be important features of student leadership. A good example of the application of these qualities is perceived by students to be apparent in actions that involve justice and fairness. Another example of how these traits in action are experienced by students is in the principal's interventions with members of staff; here students have a high expectation of trust, which is expressed in requests that the principal acts independently of teachers, and displays rationality and leniency.

The third finding, which is closely related to the second, is that these personal characteristics and the way they are displayed and utilised in dealings with students, have an effect on students' emotions: they are affective. This is again supportive of research investigating the effects of leadership on the emotional states of followers such as that by Osterman (2000), Bryk and Schneider, (2002) and Goddard (2003). The descriptions that students give of these attributes, both physical and personal, especially those hard to define human qualities that demonstrate respect and pleasantness, suggest that they promote considerable emotional effects, supporting the idea, that for students the utility of student leadership' is found in the way the principal makes them feel.

The findings from Chapter 5 have identified clear characteristics, elements of practice and behaviour that make up the principal's leadership of students. Many of them can be described as being relational or affective and characterised by the effect they have on emotion. Chapter 6 goes on to examine in more detail what seems to be the essential nature of the principal's student leadership: his relationship with his students.

Chapter 6

Perceptions of the Qualities of the Relationship between the Principal and Students

6.1 Introduction

The analysis in this section explores the nature of the relationship that students have with the principal and how individuals interpret this relationship.

The main themes that emerge from the descriptions of anecdotes and student reflections about the relationship with the principal are described as '*Different Perspectives*' of the relationship; '*Being Known*' and its importance; its contrast with their '*Relationship with Teachers*'; and the '*Qualities of the Relationship*'. These have been classified as separate themes with related codes in order to clarify and explore variations and nuances.

Theme 6A: Different Perspectives. Most students are able to comment on their relationship with the principal. This theme brings together different conceptualisations and perspectives, which range from that of confidante, to role model and father figure.

Theme 6B: Being Known. Many of the student comments were largely descriptions of how it felt to be known or not known and the effects or possible effects of these feelings on them. These have been grouped together under this thematic description of '*Being Known*'. Codes have been identified within this which can be viewed as constituent parts of the main theme; these have a clear and separate identity but meanings associated with '*Being Known*'. These are '*Being Known*': '*it feels good to be known*', '*knows some better than others*', '*it motivates*', '*it intimidates*', and '*not being known*'.

Theme 6C: Students' Relationship with Teachers. Students were asked questions about their relationship with teachers and how this contrasted with that with the principal. The aim in doing this was not to discover how they felt about teachers but to illuminate the relationship with the principal. The responses to this were particularly rich and numerous and seem to have given students something more familiar to hang their thoughts on about the

relationship with the principal. All responses were unanimous in the belief that their relationship with the principal was different from the relationship they have with teachers. This theme analyses an extremely abundant set of student responses into coherent groupings which show how students classify the differences in the relationships. These are: '*teachers deal with things differently*'; '*the relationship is more personal with teachers*'; '*we know teachers better*' and '*teachers talk to us more*'.

Theme 6D: The Qualities of the Relationship. This theme contains the largest number of references in the section and comprises students' comments that describe the relationship that students have, expect or wish for with the principal. These qualities are coded as '*care*', '*respect*' and '*authority*'.

Table 6:1 lists the themes, defined codes and the number of references and students coded to each.

Theme 6A: Different Perspectives			
Code	Coding criteria	Students	References
	Comments that illustrate the range of perspectives and conceptualisations of the relationship with the principal	n/a	n/a
Theme 6B : Being Known			
It Feels Good to be Known	Comments that make reference to the positive feelings elicited by being known by the principal.	10	12
Knows Some Better than Others	Comments demonstrating recognition that the principal knows some individuals and groups better than others, and the reasons why, and the feelings this provokes.	13	18
It Motivates	Comments illustrating the range of motivating effects that being known can bring.	15	32
It Intimidates	Comments that describe how for some, being known or being talked	15	23

	to by the principal can be intimidating.		
Not Being Known	Comments from students who feel they are not known, or speculations about the feelings that arise from not being known and some speculative comments about why students are not known.	19	29

Theme 6C: The Relationship with Teachers

Teachers Deal with Things Differently	Comments describing anecdotes and events demonstrating how teachers deal with incidents and treat students differently from the principal.	16	47
It's More Personal with Teachers	Comments suggesting that that nature of the relationship with teachers is more personal than that with the principal.	12	21
We Know Teachers Better	Comments illustrating that relationships are more personal with teachers because the roles are different and enable teachers to get to know students better.	16	25
Teachers Talk to Us More	Other comments describing the closer teacher student relationship in contrast to that with the principal	9	16

Theme 6D: The Qualities of the Relationship

Care	Comments describing various nuances of the concept of care and examples where the principal has demonstrated Care	11	17
Respect	Comments illustrating different understandings of Respect and their place in the relationship with the principal	20	33
Authority	Comments which define two concepts of Authority that students	28	55

	see in the relationship		
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Table 6:1: Qualities of the Student/Principal Relationship: thematic framework

6.2. Theme 6A: Different Perspectives

Students comment that they have a relationship with the principal. These responses are spread fairly evenly across the focus groups, which is a surprising finding as it might be expected that positive responses from students in the Known focus group would be more numerous than those from the Not Known group. However, their relationship with the principal is something that students want to comment on. Most students, whether they claim to know or be known by the principal, do have views on the relationship with the principal.

The relationship is described in different ways. Billy sees the principal as a kind of confidante and feels that “*anytime I need to talk to someone I can go to him*” (B1). Steven who claims to know the principal outside of school sees this as “*normal*” adding that “*outside of school he’s a person-person... a normal person... he’s not a big hairy monster...*” (76). Charles describes his relationship as “*like yeah a balance between friendship and leadership and all that jazz*” (C2) but Elliot feels that his relationship is more complicated. He explains that “*I think my relationship with him is not really anything to do with work, it’s just being a bit cheeky sometimes*” and continues with a key insight that:

“*yeah... like have like two relationships with him – like you got the formal and obviously he has to be a bit more authoritative when he’s like in school, but there should be like outside of school – like more relaxed...*” (111).

Brad tells his group that the “*reason why I’ve got one cos he remembers Bart (his brother)*” (B6) and after listening to the comments of others Ed, explains to the Year 11s that in his view, the personal relationship seems to be dependent on involvement in other things:

"yeah, cos people have just said, from what people have just said, the only personal relationship they have with him is through either extra-curricular stuff like sport or music or being naughty and getting told off" (112)

There is a strong indication that students value, or wish for, a relationship that is personal and immediate. Several make the interesting observation that his relationship with them means more if the principal does things himself rather than getting others to do them for him. Elliot captures the sentiment with his explanation to the group of why this would be important. He comments, "*I think he'd gain a lot more respect... it would kinda put him up on another level... and make people think – oh that's pretty cool it's from him sort of... if he actually replied to their own ideas*" (111). Although it is clear that students understand that the principal has to delegate functions, they feel that some things should be done personally. Like Elliot, Nina thinks that there should be more of this "*like, when we've assemblies like where we give out certificates and stuff, he should really do that himself*" (N3). Nicole thinks this would make the occasion "*seem more important*" (N2) and Natalie that "*you'd take it on board*" (N6) presumably in a way that is more significant than when others do it.

The Not Known focus group students feel strongly about this and illustrate their anger with comments about a newly introduced reward system of Praise Postcards. Nathan comments that "*it's just a postcard....*" (N1) prompting the derisory comment from Nicole that "*he hasn't filled it in, he'll just go - oh - to his secretary, I need this sent out...*" (N2). Similarly an idea proposed that the principal could phone home is met with negativity by Nick who thinks that "*if it's on the phone it's still suggesting he's staying in his office and not out and about...*" (N4). This common complaint seems to be one of distance from the students and an implication of a lack of sincerity when recognition is second hand. This is reflected in Elliot's comment that "*maybe if you get someone else to do it they've got the issue of he won't actually be connecting with the children again...*" (112). But for Nathan, thankfully, despite his dismissal of the postcard reward it seems that recognition by the principal does count after all:

"it would be great if it was a member of staff, but if it was Mr Blue and he said - well thanks, you know, I'll try my best to sort it out"(N1).

Finally, for some students their perception of the relationship can be described as paternalistic, and, related to this concept, possessing the quality of role modelling. Both Connor and Carol choose "*role model*" to describe the principal, with Carol explaining that "*we need someone to look up to – don't we.... we need a role model for us*" (C1). But it is Charles' comment that best captures this idea. In answer to Luke's prompts for descriptions of the principal he gives this metaphoric summary:

"like I said a minute ago, like the students are the children and he's like the father of the school ... you know, so we need somebody to look up to... like cos children look up to their fathers and that..." (C2).

6.2. Theme 6B: Being Known

6.2.1. *It Feels Good to Be Known*

When asked about how it makes them feel if they thought the principal knew them, or when he acknowledges them, the responses that are given are mostly positive. Students are generally affirmative using comments such as "yeah" (B6) and "definitely..." (C3) when asked if they want to be known by the principal. Other comments in answer to the same question provide insight into their feelings about this relationship. These include:

- "*you'd feel much prouder as well though... I'd be chuffed...*" (B4);
- "*I'd be like wow – why thank you*" (C1);
- "*if he walked past you and said good work in so and so – you'd be like whoa... I must be dreaming... "Yeah, it would be a nice feeling..." you'd want to tell everyone*"(C2);
- "*that would be nice...*(C3);
- "*it would just be nice to be acknowledged by somebody that's, you know, the head of the school...*"(N2);
- "*I'd walk off feeling great...*" (N4).

To Kevin being recognised feels positive but rather surprising: “

“*yeah, it's like good... its good like in a way sort of thing but it's like – 'bloody hell it's me'*...”(K2)

Similarly there are positive responses to the question “how does it make you feel when he talks to you – do you like it or not like it?” (Luke BFG) such as Brad’s “*it's fine yeah...*” (B6). Belle and Billy confirm that they welcome his attention when “*he is watching what you're doing and making sure you're behaving*” (Ben BG), (B5, B1) with Billy even claiming to feel “*upset*” when he gets told off because he wants to be well thought of by the principal.

And it is not only Billy who wants to be viewed in this light. There are comments that suggest that being known by the principal counts for more than being known by other adult staff. This seems to be the sentiment expressed by Kevin in an exchange with Luke:

“yeah, to know that Mr Blue as the boss like to of...yeah... for him to say congratulations and stuff it'd be like... “

“It would be a big deal?” (Luke)

“*yeah*” (K3).

Carol confirms to the others that “*you wouldn't want him to dislike you...*” adding “*yeah... I mean you wouldn't want him to turn up for review day and be like – you've got a horrible child... exclude her...*” (C1). Students like Nathan also want to be known as individuals so that “*he'd recognise you in the street and go 'hello' - you know - and you could say hello back*” (N1). As if to confirm the importance of this recognition these Year 7 students, Sam, Sara and Seb, are eager to let others in the focus group know that he knows them:

- “*he knows my name...*”(73);
- “*he goes hello*”(72);
- “*I saw him swimming in the lido... he said hi to me...*” (71).

However, although there is agreement amongst students that they like to be known by the principal and that it is important to them, there is some recognition and even consternation that some students go out of their way to get themselves known and noticed. This point is made by Beth who disapproves of students who try “*to get in his good books...*” (B4). In the same group, Brad describes how he has noticed “*this boy in my class who tries to behave as well as he can and he wants Mr Blue to notice him, but he comes in and doesn't*

notice him – he just picks the naughty one out.” (B6). This comment also illustrates an issue raised by other students, like the boy described in the comment above, which concerns the difficulties good students have in getting noticed.

Good students really don't like the fact that it seems more difficult for them to be known by the principal. Ed explains that it feels like “*you kinda fade into the background a bit....*” and elaborates on this with the explanation that “*you get students who get A*s and everything and they're noticed – get congratulated and getting certificates and stuff, and the students who aren't so good get extra help and are helped... but the people that are average it's just kinda like, Aah they're good – whatever*” (112). Well behaved students, Corinne and Scott express similar feelings but point out the possible risks involved in this. Corinne warns that if they become known and recognised by the principal that “*we'd probably be called teacher's pet... I guess...*” (C3) with Scott acknowledging that for such students “*it means they stand out of the whole school...*” (75).

Students also make comments, such as this from Carol, that they want the principal to be someone who “*shows an interest in them.*” (C1). It is felt by Nicole that an important function of his role is to “*know the students...*” (N2) and Noah agrees: “*yeah he should be...there for that*” (N5). Nick thinks that this “*would make a lot of difference, yeah...*” (N4) and in illustrating this idea and confirming its importance to her Corinne describes at some length how the female headteacher of her previous secondary school showed her interest in students by personally giving out reports to students and making comments on them in her own handwriting:

“*yeah it was nice cos she'd erm say... oh well done you've done well in this and she said oh, maybe next term try and improve in this subject and do this and this and... And it was handwritten, it wasn't like photocopied...*” (C3).

For Steven it seems important that even if the principal doesn't know them that he makes every effort to “*find out what we're like*” (76) whilst Kevin, who clearly carries a personal irritation that his part in breaking a school record at sports

day has never been recognised by the principal, makes the point in a very personal way:

"but I think like obviously like in the academic side of school I'm not that good, but in like sports and stuff.... I think that he should talk to other teachers, cos in sports like, if I like.... If someone broke a school record.... he'd be able to know and he'd be able to bring that up..... cos he's never like.....Not just like maths and English and stuff...I think we actually broke the school record in the 400 metre relay..." (K3).

At the same time as commenting that being known is important it is also recognised by some students that it is difficult for the principal to know every one of them, but still feel that it is important for him to make the effort. Emma illustrates this point suggesting that she can "*understand why he can't do it for everyone in the school, but he should do it for the majority of the students...*" (115). Year 11 Kendall, although a member of the *known* focus group, with some exasperation it seems, agrees with this point but would, perhaps unrealistically, expect better for students in Year 11:

"But then you can't expect him to know the name of every student in the school... but, like when we're in Year 11..." (K6).

Elliot, also Year 11, makes a similar point along the same lines and develops it further by making a telling point in the process about the different kind of relationship the older students seem to have with the principal:

"I think if he made a bigger effort in Year 7, cos when I came here in Year 7, I don't remember him making the effort to know the new people in the school – which he should really and that would start it off, so by the time your Year 11 he should know you a lot more... cos some people only start talking to him today, just as we're leaving..." (111).

Sara also recognises that all the names would be "*impossible to learn...*" (72). Corinne agrees that "*yeah we understand...I think it would because it's a really big school and it's hard to get everyone... to fit everyone in...*" (C3) but her friend Carol reminds her that "*we don't like it though...*" (C1). The final comment in this section belongs to Nicole who believes that the importance of the principal making efforts to get to know students lies in the fact that "*it would feel like we have been noticed*" (N2).

6.3.2. Some Are Known Better than Others

Students recognise that some students are better known than others.

Individuals suggest a variety of reasons why they are known by the principal, why others get known and others do not. It seems difficult for them to accept that he will just know them without there being a particular reason. This point is made by Emma who suggests that “*he doesn’t know who you are – he knows you for other things...*” (115). Her meaning here seems to be that you get known for a reason that is exceptional. In her case she feels that “*the only reason he knows who I am, is because he had a load of problems with my brother*” (115). This point is made in a different way by Steven who explains to Luke “*I don’t know how Mr Blue knows my name cos I’m never naughty*” (76). When asked for further explanation of this he reiterates that “*Mr Blue knows my name but I’m not naughty...*” The implication here is that to be known by the principal a student will have to do something out of the ordinary, like be naughty. Despite reassurance from Luke who tells the College Council focus group that “*the funny thing is, I think Mr Blue would know all of you guys...*” Carol replies that it is “*only cos we’ve been in his office*” and poses an interesting question at the same time: “*what about every other kid that isn’t in the school council... who is just the average person who plays football*” (C1).

Individual students tell of their own relationships with the principal and the reasons they think they have a relationship. For Brad, the relationship developed over an incident that he was involved in. He describes how “*he made a deal with me*” and goes on to explain that the principal had said “*if you start behaving you can do this... or something like that...*” (B6). Ben from the same group adds a similar story about the beginnings of his relationship with the principal who had “*said to me yeah – cos I bought my BB gun in – he said don’t bring it in again and you won’t get in trouble...*” (B3). Others have less of

a story to tell but mention that “*I know him out of school though so like...*” (K5) or like Bridget who thinks that she may be known but observes that “*he (the principal) don't show it*” even though she does admit that “*he talks to me...*” (B2). Kieran agrees that he has a relationship with the principal, but only “*sort of*” (K2) which causes him to be “*really not too bad with him – cos every time I like see him he's like – Oh Kieran how you doing?*” (K2). Kevin too describes how he will “*say hello to him but.... he'll say it back... but I don't think he'd say it first...*” (K3).

However, it is recognised by behaviour students but also by others that the best way to be known is to be poorly behaved. Belle states what appears to be a commonly held view when she explains that “*I think the only reason he knows us is because of our behaviour though.....*” (B5). She contrasts this with “*people that do their work all the time and never get into trouble....*” indicating that she thinks such students are not known at all by the principal. Her friend Beth in the same group agrees but adds poignantly “*but sometimes you wanna be noticed by the headteacher for your good side as well, not just your bad*” (B4). Kevin, not included in the behaviour focus group, even though he has been excluded, confirms that he feels that it is his behaviour that has got him known. He tells the rest of the group that he has spoken with the principal but only “*when I've been excluded and stuff.*” (K3). Kara agrees that the principal knows the behaviour students “*better than the well-behaved ones.*” (K5). This according to her friend Katie in the same group is inevitable. She reasons that “*I think in a way, like, he's gonna know the bad behaved kids more than the well behaved kids cos... Yeah ... cos he has to deal with them more.*”

6.3.3. It Motivates

Students were asked directly “would it make you feel really proud that he knows and likes you” (Luke BFG). There was a very positive response to this from behaviour students. Bridget suggests that “*it might change the behaviours and stuff...*” (B2); Billy comments that “*yeah, I'd be good...*” (B1) and his friend, Beth makes a well observed point that being noticed by the principal might be worth

more than being noticed by others. Her point is that “cos he’s like the head of the school and he’s the main bloke and you wanna please him that you’re doing really well” (B4).

Another strong point is made by Nicole who feels that being known by the principal may even have a positive effect on her motivation. She comments that “yeah and also because it encourages you more, like you feel like - oh well you know, it pushes you to do more....” (N2). When her friend in the same group agrees with her suggestion that being known would be motivating she reiterates the same point more strongly confirming that “yeah, it would encourage you to do even better...” Elliot also makes the point that being known by the principal can be motivating. He goes further and suggests that being known makes him “happy... and want to achieve...” (112). However, the same boy also describes how he would feel if the principal actually offered to help a student in a lesson he came into. In elaborating on a comment by Emma who would be “shocked....” (115) if this happened he would personally feel “like a bit intimidated cos everyone would behave, but I think if he done it more often people will learn to respect him and be like oh yeah Mr Blue is coming in today or...”(112). But other Year 11 students confirm the positive effects on motivation being acknowledged might bring. When asked for their feelings “if Mr Blue came up and said – oh well done on that bit of coursework...” (Luke 11FG) the responses are all positive. They include:

- “yeah, that would push you on...”(111);
- “you’d be like sweet – my effort has been appreciated...push you on” (112);
- “really good....”(113);
- “it makes you feel proud...(116);
- “I feel pride...”(114);
- “you think... oh he’s noticed me now.... I’ve done something good and he’s noticed me...” (113).

6.3.4. It Intimidates

But not all students feel comfortable being known by the principal and some feel quite intimidated by this. There is a mixed view on this amongst behaviour students when asked “how would you feel if you had a one to one interview with

him – just you and him in his office...?" (BFG, CFG). Beth and Bridget would both feel uncomfortable with this. Beth thinks it "would be scary" (B4) and Bridget would only consider it with "maybe two people" (B2). Brad, however, would be "fine with it: I wouldn't care" (B6). However, the College Council group feel more wary generally with four of them mentioning that they would feel "scared" (C4) or "intimidated" (C1). Connor elaborates on his reasons explaining that "*I think we don't want to get into trouble cos we know that might happen to us...*" It seems he is alluding to an idea that the interview with the principal only happens if you are in trouble. He continues with a comment that suggests real discomfort with the thought of a personal interview suggesting "*that's not really the way to make people behave well – to make them afraid*" (C5).

Others express similar comments of feeling worried about being face to face with the principal. Kendall feels that she "couldn't go up to Mr Blue and like just be like..." (K6) whilst Kara thinks that with the principal you can't "be yourself..." (K5). Kendall expands further on her fears and explains that she gets worried that she is in trouble when the principal approaches. She comments that "*if I see him coming towards me I think like – oh, what have I got on that I shouldn't have and like... take my earrings out or something...*" (K6) Nina and Nick would feel "too intimidated" (N4, N3) with Nick commenting "*I think you should feel relaxed with your headteacher so that if you did have a problem you could go to him*" (N3). From the same group Nicole expresses quite powerfully how her meetings with Mr Blue make her feel:

"yeah, like some teachers talk to you like you're kids - but others don't - whereas when you talk to Mr Blue you kinda always feel that you have to kinda not say anything and just shut up and listen..."(N2).

Some of the comments above from students who have been defined by being Not Known by the principal may be understandable. However, it is the Year 11 group that make the most nuanced and thoughtful comments on the *uncomfortable* aspects of being known by him. Ewan explains the feeling by relating it to the unfamiliarity he feels when meeting new people:

"kinda a bit scared in a way cos when you meet a new person you're always like a bit scared... that you wanna try and impress them or whatever... like with your teacher, you're just like normal to your teacher cos you know them like really well so you're kinda more comfortable with them...."(113).

Other Year 11 students also give reasons why they feel more intimidated by the principal than by other teachers. Eve thinks that it is because "*he has all the power, he can do what he wants...*" (116) and Ed just doesn't "*feel comfortable around him*" (112) and explains why with some eloquence:

"yeah the students can get quite a lot of their views across, but again I think us being students and being in there with the Headteacher and stuff – you do feel slightly intimated and stuff because obviously they've done it loads before and even though they're your teachers you still feel a bit timid to get your point across and speak up..." (112).

Esther feels that "*there's only a certain amount of things you can say cos... well you can tell him something and then he might not accept you saying that...*" (114). Eve expresses her desire to speak freely and more comfortably with the principal "*like we're saying what we think now*" (116) but accepts the thought from Ewan that it would best be done "*if you were with a lot of people*" (113).

6.3.5. Not Being Known

Some students claim that the principal does not know them. However, despite this belief, their comments in response to other questions rather suggest that some have a lot of interaction with the principal and are probably well known. This is particularly true of the behaviour students. However, three of these feel that they are not known by the principal. When it is suggested by Luke that the principal knows each one of them Bridget replies that "*he don't show it though – he don't talk to us*" (B2) with Beth adding "*but he's never really talked to me so... I can imagine that if he's not shouting at you – you would feel quite proud that the headteacher has noticed you and is talking to you*" (B4).

Equally surprising is the claim by some college Council students that the principal does not know them either. These are students that would meet with

the principal twice each term. Most comments are of the nature of “*he doesn’t know my name...*” (C4) conveying the idea expressed by Charles that “*nobody has a relationship (with him) cos he does not notice any of us*” (C2). The explanation for this according to Corinne is “*because we’re general students we don’t normally get noticed... Unless you do something cool*” (C3). Less surprising perhaps are comments from Not Known students who feel that the principal doesn’t know them and that “*he’s never talked to me...ever*” (N3). Nina feels so strongly about this that she repeats the statement further on in the group meeting. Nathan goes as far as to suggest that the principal knows very few students:

“no it’s like he doesn’t like you know, like you go around and you know most the people in the school - but if you asked Mr Blue who was this or who was this? - he wouldn’t know any of them... so it’s like he doesn’t know any of his students, so how can he teach someone or interact when he doesn’t know them...” (N1).

Nicole and Natalie agree with this explanation with Natalie claiming that “*if you walk past him.... and you like, not smile but kinda acknowledge him - many a time I’ve done it before now and he’s just completely blanked me, so I just don’t bother any more*” (N2).

Some Year 7 students also claim that the principal doesn’t know them. Sara describes how not being acknowledged by the principal makes her feel “*like I’m not there...*” (72). Steven recounts how he “*said hi to him the other day and he didn’t say anything – just ignored me... I was next to him and said ‘hi Mr Blue but he didn’t say anything...*” (76). For Year 11 students, perhaps understandably, less of them feel unknown. However, Eve feels she is still not known by the principal even though she has been in the school for five years. She explains to the group that “*the only time I’ve ever spoken to him is when I’ve worn the wrong trousers or been caught with my phone... so I don’t really...*” and tells the group that she had “*asked him to sign my t-shirt and he said – sorry what’s your name again*” (116).

6.4. Theme 6C: The Relationship with Teachers

6.4.1. Teachers Deal with Things Differently

When asked “do you think teachers deal with students in the same way as the headteacher does?”(Luke FG) all responses, across all groups, disagreed. Beth thought this was because the principal doesn’t actually do anything reasoning that *“I reckon that teachers do it differently to headteachers cos the headteacher like... don’t really do anything – if you know what I mean”* (B4). Others seem to feel that because the teachers know them more personally they are able to bend the rules and treat them more sympathetically. This is expressed by Kevin who describes how *“when someone breaks a rule, then a teacher puts it into their own personal way how they wanna deal with the child.”* (K3). He explains further that *“I mean like, for a punishment, if a child does something wrong they get excluded but maybe they like didn’t - but the teacher isn’t doing by the rules they’re doing it by their own personal feelings”* (K3).

This point is picked up in other focus groups and is drawn out by questions exploring the possible differing expectations of behaviour from some teachers and the principal. Emma, for instance, feels that teachers are *“more lenient because they deal with you every day and know if something is a major problem or if it’s just a small thing that’s gonna take a couple of minutes”*(115). She illustrates the point further suggesting that *“I think if he (the principal) came in at the beginning of the lesson when everyone’s shouting and stuff cos we can’t be bothered to work at the very beginning, I think he’d have a full-on go, whereas our teachers know just to wait for us to settle down a bit...”* (115). Eve agrees and thinks this is because *“they know what to expect – like with their personality – whether they’re being serious or mucking about”* (116). Beth gives a personal example of how teachers have been more lenient with her than the principal. She illustrates this nicely describing how when challenged about some item of jewellery *“the teacher would just be like – pass it over you can get it back at the end of the day... but he’ll be like blarh”* (B4).

Another point is made which relates back to the ‘Fairness’ code discussed above. This is that some students feel less fairly treated by the principal than by

teachers. Elliot describes how he feels “*annoyed that he’s talking to you in a way because usually you get told off by a teacher and they have a reason... but I think if you get told off by Mr Blue it’s...*” (111). Ewan finishes the point and explains more fully with a useful illustration:

“like say if you’re in the corridor and a teacher sees you do something bad, then the teacher who’s there should tell you off.... but if Mr Blue’s there like the headteacher wouldn’t let the teacher tell you off – they would take charge, sort of like that and then you think it’s not really his place even though he was there” (113).

But some students perceive other teachers being more ‘principal-like’ than the principal. Carol asks her Focus Group “*do you think it’s more his school or some of his staff’s school... the more forceful school, like, teachers?*” (C1). In asking this question it seems she has particular teachers in mind as she continues “*would you say he’s the leader of the school or if you came here would you think someone like Mr Green or Mr Black was head?*” (C1). One of the teachers she names is mentioned a lot by other students as being very ‘principal-like’. This is a teacher who is seen with the principal a lot and has the role of behaviour leader. He is popular, and very strong in dealing with difficult students and parents, but manages to deal with most incidents so that all parties feel well treated. By identifying him, students are making statements about the type of relationship they want with the principal. Many students make this point well, but most clearly is a known girl who says, “*yeah, cos I feel like, if that, like if that thing about Mr Black I can go up and have a joke with Mr Green and like make comments and just mess around and stuff, but at the same time Mr Green keeps everyone in place like*” (K6).

In contrast to their perception of Mr Green these students feel less easy with the principal. Kendall admits that she “*couldn’t go up to Mr Blue and like just be like*” (K6). Her sentence is finished by Kara who adds “*yourself*” (K5.) A perceptive idea is raised by Kevin, who joins in the same exchange with a comment about Mr Green. He explains “*that’s his job though..... if he swapped jobs..... If they swapped jobs you’d see Mr Blue a lot more and you wouldn’t see Mr Green*” (K3). In recognising the depth of the comment, Luke picks up the sentiment and

asks “so do you feel that’s why Mr Blue has Mr Green so he can do the bits that he can’t do – if that makes sense?” The group murmur in agreement at this suggestion.

6.4.2. It’s More Personal with Teachers

Students are very clear both that they are known by their teachers and that their teachers know them. These three responses are included in full as they illustrate in detail the value students place on this personal relationship and also the nuanced meanings each sees:

- “yeah and they know your names, they know what like, they know your behaviour, they know your work...”(C2);
- “yeah, say if like you’re having a bad day and you snap out at a teacher... the teacher would be like umm.... Okay this really isn’t like you blah, blah, blah... whereas if you got sent to Mr Blue he’d just like shout at you because he doesn’t actually know how you are, he just... he doesn’t know if you’re having a bad day... he doesn’t know anything about you”(C3);
- “and you kinda like trust them more cos you know them as people cos you kinda get to.... Cos when you get into Year 10 and stuff like some teachers actually talk to you like your age and you kinda get to know them as people...”(N2).
-

6.4.3. We Know Teachers Better

At the same time as students feel they are better known by their teachers they also feel that they know their teachers better. There are many responses which indicate this sentiment but these from Year 11 students are representative. Eve believes that “*students are more comfortable with their normal everyday teachers than their headteacher cos they don’t know him*” (116). Ewan affirms the point she is making suggesting that “*like with your teacher, you’re just like normal to your teacher cos you know them like really well so you’re kinda more comfortable with them....*” (113). In a much longer intervention Ewan makes a further point about how difficult it would be for the principal to have the same closeness of relationship as teachers even if he did visit classrooms more often:

"but yeah if he did come in like way more often, you wouldn't get as close as your normal teachers though... because he's kinda of not teaching you, he's just sat there listening like" (113)

6.4.4. Teachers Talk to You More

One of the reasons suggested by some for this difference in closeness, including Nina, is that "*normal teachers they talk to you more*" (N3). This response is representative of many that comment on the contrasting amount of talk between teachers and students, and principal and student. Nicole agrees with Nina and adds that "*when you talk to Mr Blue you kinda always feel that you have to kinda not say anything and just shut up and listen*" (N2). Katie too adds her story to confirm the point describing the occasion when the principal and Mr Green were talking to her. She comments that the only real conversation was with the teacher, Mr Green, and not the principal:

"like at the end of school, when like Mr Green's been there he's sort of walked with Mr Blue, and like Mr Green it was only really Mr Green talking to us, not really him.... I think if I was to talk to him, it would be more like Mr Green than Mr Blue" (K4).

6.5. Theme 6D: Qualities of the Relationship

6.5.1. Care

One of the qualities in the relationship that students see and value is care. This sentiment is contained in this comment by Billy who claims the he has a relationship with the principal "*cos anytime I need to talk to someone I can go to him*" (B1). Beth, in the same group, sees his visits to classrooms as an indicator of his care for them (B4) and Sara agrees suggesting that "*it makes you think he cares about you and what we are doing.*" (72). Steven's thoughtful comment about caring adds a more complex level to his understanding of how care is shown by the principal. He believes that the classroom visits demonstrate a caring attitude because he sees the principal checking up on the teaching they are receiving: "*yeah and how the teachers are, what they're like and that they're teaching us right*" (76).

The concept of care is behind other comments made such as that made by Belle who declares that “*I’m well happy they’ve got the beauty salon now*” (B5) when prompted to think of things that the principal has done for them. In a similar exchange in the known focus group Bridget tells the rest that the reason the principal spends a lot of time working with the behaviour students is “*because he wants them to improve more and get the thing.... so they don’t come to school for nothing*” (K2). This is the same quality that Sally is describing when she comments how “*you don’t know what you should do so he helps you*” (74) and when Steven describes how “*I think he’s good cos my mate ran across the road and Mr Blue told him off...and it was for his own safety so it was good*” (76).

6.5.2. Respect

In discussion about what constitutes good student leadership Luke points out to the Council students that “you’ve mentioned respect quite a lot?” The same concept occurs in the same discussion with Year 11 students who identify it as their “number one” for good student leadership. The concept of respect is mentioned a lot and along with the related concept of authority could be said to be perceived as the defining quality in the relationship between principal and students. Respect has different meanings and nuances for the students and an attempt has been made to capture and represent these in this analysis.

The main meaning of respect seems to be to be treated properly, not talked down to, to be communicated with at their level. Another meaning in terms of respect given to the principal by students is that which is closely linked with the concept of authority: this section covers both meanings. The first meaning is well explained by Emma a Year 11 student. As part of a discussion initiated by Luke’s opening question to the Focus Group “so the first question would be – what do you think makes a good headteacher in terms of how they lead students... anybody got any ideas on that one?” she describes the relationship between the headteacher and students at one school she knows:

"I know one school where the headteacher and the students are really close and it's the sort of joking relationship at the same time – because they like him so much and they even took bets about what he was going to do in his speech which was really funny.... It's the whole.... They still respect him a lot more, because he gets down to their level and talks to them about what's going on with them in their out of school lives and in the end he can still keep his sort of respect – because when he needs to be, he can be the strict teacher that can control a room..." (115).

The second meaning is explained by another Year 11 student, Ed, as part of the same discussion:

"I was gonna say respect is like a big part cos if students respect the headteacher or any teacher they will like listen to what they have to say and they will like behave themselves..." (112).

These two students develop the theme well and Emma, in particular, explains how she feels respect works in the relationship between students and principal:

"cos you've gotta earn it to actually have it, so for us to respect him he has to earn it and for him to respect us we have to earn it at the same time...So instead of demanding respect and saying he has a right to it – earning it himself... cos we're told from teachers we have to earn respect sort of thing, but we have to respect him..." (115).

Ed's understanding of respect is slightly different. He introduces the idea of discipline into the concept. He appears to be suggesting that he agrees with the idea of the principal disciplining students; this is consistent with his opening comment but adds the idea that discipline will only be effective if the person giving the discipline, the principal, has respect in the first place:

"I think that the students should be disciplined and if they respect the person, they'll be disciplined in what they're doing anyway..." (112).

These descriptions summarise the main conceptions of respect but a further nuance is added by Eve. Her suggestion that "*in some ways we respect him more because we don't know him so well*" (116), runs counter to the assumption that respect is found in a largely equal relationship. She seems to be suggesting that respect exists because there is distance between students and the principal. This links to the idea that respect can be a concomitant of

the principal's position and in order to examine this idea further students were asked questions such as "do you think that people listen more when Mr Blue speaks?" (C FG) and "do you think people listen when Mr Blue speaks?" (NK FG).

It turns out that many students believe this to be the case. In the Council group Connor thinks that what Mr Blue says "*definitely sinks into the students more*" and that "*if he walks into a classroom everyone automatically falls quiet*" (C5). Charles agrees and illustrates this further by pointing out that "*it's like in assembly... Ms Yellow is like talking and nobody cares, nobody looks, nobody listens... but if Mr Blue walks in everybody's like – whoa... jeez... lets stare at him*" (C2). Students in the Known group respond similarly with Nina explaining that it is "*probably, cos he's the head and it seems more important so, it seems more of an important thing if he says it...*" (N3); Natalie too adds that if the head said something "*you'd take it on board...*" (N6). Year 7 responses are also mostly affirmative. Only one of the four who comment thinks people do not take notice of what Mr Blue says. In contrast the rest are in agreement that people listen to and act on what the principal says. Scott puts it like this:

"yeah, cos you have to homework – he wouldn't say 'I want' he would say 'you have to' have your homework done by next month" (75).

6.5.3. Authority

There are many references coded to authority but only three that use the word authority directly. Natalie uses it to describe the principal as "*the major authority*" (N6); Eve who recognises that "*he's got the authority, but I think he could get involved with students more, with what goes on*" (116) and by Ed who also recognises that "*he's got the authority and like decision making and stuff,*" (112). These two descriptions exemplify how authority can have different meanings but Elliot clarifies this distinction more clearly. In describing the principal's leadership he likens it to "*a dictatorship... in a way cos he's like untouchable, because you can't communicate with him really – you're not even allowed at his door*" (111).

This *authoritarian* meaning conveyed here is also prominent in other comments which connect it with the concept of control. Kendall, for instance, in a discussion about order and good and bad principals explains that “*I think he needs it (control) though. I think if he didn’t have it he wouldn’t have the authority that he does have...*” (K6). And control is not necessarily seen negatively; students recognise that there is a need for control. Corinne comments that “*there’s got to be some control*” (C3); Crystal agrees the principal should be “*like taking control*” but adds that he should “*kinda making a joke of it*” (C4) and, similarly, Nicole thinks that “*he needs control but just not to the point where he doesn’t talk to anyone*” (N2). More graphically Charles imagines that if the principal did not take control then “*it would be manic... cos everyone would be running round, smoking pot and stuff like that*” (C2) whilst Natalie confirms the need for someone to be in control overall by making the interesting comment that although “*there’s loads of other teachers that are in control but then there’s like...*” (N6).

6.6 Summary

Not surprisingly perhaps, the data of the students’ perceptions of the qualities of the relationship with the principal, focus on its non rational aspects, what have been called the “hot topics” in social psychology (O’Brien 2006: 5): attraction, emotion and personal feeling. Also not surprisingly, the salient areas of interest identified from the literature of relevance to this emotional data, are the same as those for Chapter 5 from which three proposals in the emotional dimension were put forward. Those which best seem to make sense of the students’ comments, appear to be that which identified the role of trust, and its associated qualities such as caring in the relationship between principal and student, and that which identified the role of leaders’ traits as instrumental in affecting the emotions of followers.

When these are considered with the relevant student data, two main findings emerge. The first is that the relationship with the principal is perceived to be

important because it has an effect on the way students feel. This would seem to support research that identifies the importance of strong relationships as a factor in effective leadership and the role of the leader in influencing these relationships (Duffield et al 2000, Goddard 2003, Tschanen Moran 2004). Some students also suggest that they perceive the quality of their relationship with the principal to have the potential to alter the way they feel. Most indicate a positive relationship makes them feel better and that 'Being Known' can have a motivating effect. Of equal importance are the comments that indicate that 'Not Being Known' can have a demotivating effect.

The nuances within this finding suggest that students have a trusting expectation of the principal. They describe a different relationship between them and their teachers from their relationship with him. Understandably, students perceive themselves to have a closer more direct relationship with teachers, who they acknowledge they deal with on a regular basis, but nevertheless, there is an expectation that the principal knows them and gets to know them. There is also an expectation that the principal arbitrates the teachers' behaviour and prevents students from being treated badly by teachers. Failure to do this and failure to get to know them, is considered to be unfair and a betrayal of their trusting expectations, recognised by firstly the behaviour students who feel they have a better relationship because of their more regular dealings with the principal, and secondly the better behaved students, who feel unfairly treated.

The second finding supports the suggestion already made in Chapter 5 that the relationship with the principal has an emotional effect on students. Within the theme of 'Being Known' students largely describe emotional rather than rational qualities of the student/ principal relationship. But along with those themes identified as 'Care', 'Respect' and 'Authority' they may also provide some indication of the operative psychological mechanism that the emotional effect may have. In light of the literature that proposes the positive leadership effects of emotional leadership (Goleman et al 2010, 1998, Salovey and Mayer 1990) the data discussed may be suggestive of a relationship with the principal that may have a positive affirmative and affiliative effect on some students.

Chapter 7

Discussion

“With a good grasp of the subject will come the knowledge of what is worth remembering and what is not”

(Csikszentmihalyi)

The analyses of the preceding three data Chapters provide a collective description of the participant students' perceptions of features of the principal's student leadership. Their interpreted meanings have been constructed and condensed into a narrative of this aspect of their experience at school. From this description, suggested hypotheses are generated, both from the supporting empirical evidence presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6, which is emphasised and highlighted, and from the relevant aspects of literature identified earlier. It is hoped that these may then provide the illuminative perspective sought for this study and the research questions

7.1 How do Students Conceptualise Student Leadership?

The data presented in Chapter 4 and its analysis into four main themes and six sub themes is suggestive of a nuanced conceptualisation of a principal's student leadership. The data that contribute to Theme A, those that reflect on the importance of having a principal, can be categorised as either recognising strongly the principal's role, its effect and necessity in the school or as the opposite. The first conceptualisation is that encapsulated in the sub theme 'the man in charge' with comments such as "top power" (B3), "Mr Man at the top of the school" (C1), and the one "main person" (K2). It is also seen in the descriptions of the principal as the "father" of the school (C2) and the "head" and "heart" of the school (76). These comments may reasonably be interpreted as indicating that these students see the principal as the source of power in the school organisation, and as such, may be describing a perception of the direct effect his decisions may have on them. For them, student leadership appears to be instrumental; it is perceived as having a direct effect on them and affects them in different, but personal ways. However, there is the

contrasting perception of other students, which is evidenced in the sub theme ‘the man in the shadow’.

These contrasting perceptions may have relevance to the on-going debate about the most effective approach to school leadership. Space does not permit a full exposition of the research literature devoted to this but many researchers support the idea that leadership can have more significant effects when it is distributed, for example, Gronn (2002), NCSL (2006), Harris (2008), Dempster (2009), Day et al (2010), rather than being restricted to the persona of leader figure such as the principal. From this perspective it is argued that leadership is best carried out as a group activity and should not be seated with a particular person. In support of this, one researcher suggests that “the cult of the charismatic leader is coming to an end in business then it certainly should be in schools” (Dempster 2009:28). Leadership in this dimension advocates utilisation of all leadership capacity in schools, namely that of all adults and this in my own school as well as in the literature is certainly the dominant and successful approach. Layers of leaders and self managers of all kinds carry leadership and its attendant responsibilities with them in my school. For some students however, their perception appears to be that leadership of the school is situated in the role of the principal alone with the added observation evidenced in sub theme ‘the teachers’ leader’ and discussed in Chapter 4, that the role appears to be very different from the one they perceive for their teachers. There is no indication in the sub theme ‘teachers’ leader’(Theme 4A) that students perceive leadership functions for teachers other than in classroom level matters and have an expectation that the principal makes sure they carry them out in the interests of the students.

As well as some conceptualisations being suggestive of intentional, principal leadership effects, rather than those more indicative of shared leadership, comments included in Theme 4B , ‘The roles that constitute student leadership’ further support the idea, that for some, the principal has a more direct effect on their school experience. These are the comments that reflect a belief that the principal “looks up the attendance” (B3), “changes the uniform” (C1), “makes up

the punishments" (K1), "gets us our GCSEs" (73), "puts us in sets" (74) and "changes the school day" (C2). These are of a different kind from those mentioned which recognise the direct effect on them in his managerial capacity in which he "gets the money for the school" (B1) or tries to "get us the best facilities" (C1). Nevertheless all point to the *perception* of some students that there can be a real and quantifiable direct effect on their school experience contained within the principal's student leadership.

These observations of what student leadership consists of may contain some of those 'instructional' leadership practices identified in the research literature. These have been described as focusing "predominantly on the role of the school principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising, and developing curriculum and instruction in the school" (Hallinger 2003: 331). This leadership approach, which was conceptualised from school effectiveness research into effective school change and improvement, such as Edmonds (1979) and Leitner (1994) has been identified as being particularly effective in challenging schools (Andrews and Soder 1987). In Hallinger's conceptualisation of this construct (Hallinger 2003) three dimensions are proposed which are, defining the school's mission, managing the instructional programme, and promoting a positive school-learning climate. The students' understandings of this aspect of the principal's leadership could be located most comfortably in the second dimension, managing the instructional programme, which is an interesting observation in light of one of the only commonly agreed findings in principal effects literature: the consensus that principals and headteachers have an effect on student outcomes which is largely indirect and mediated through teachers.

This characteristic of principal effectiveness, that the effects of their actions and behaviours are largely on others, mostly teachers, who then go on to affect a variety of student outcomes is emphasised in the theoretical models of leadership effects discussed above in Chapter 2. There it was noted that most researchers, for instance Hallinger and Heck (1996), Bell et al (2003), Leithwood et al (2010) hold similar views to that expressed by Robinson:

"unless they are teaching principals, there is likely to be a long causal chain between the actions of principals and student outcomes. By and large, they impact indirectly on student outcomes by creating conditions under which teachers—who have a much more direct influence—are able to be effective." (Robinson 2009:73).

This, unusually, given "the contested nature of educational leadership literature" (Robinson 2009: 73) has become an accepted and almost unchallenged canonical assertion of the research field. It is a justifiable common sense assumption to expect a non teaching principal to have only a secondary, intermediary, indirect effect on student learning. This leadership from 'outside of the classroom' can only work if it can "exercise of some form of positive influence on the work of other colleagues, especially teachers, as well as on the status of key conditions or characteristics of the organization (school culture, for example) that have a direct influence on pupils" (Leithwood et al 2006: 85).

Data included in Themes 4A and 4B (Table 4.1) and discussed in Chapter 4 suggest that for some students their conceptualisation of student leadership exists at a student level rather than school level and in terms of a personal relationship. There are nuances within this which are seen in differing attitudes of individuals and between groups such as the Behaviour and Council students, for example, in Theme 4B, and the roles that constitute student leadership especially sub themes 'checking up' and 'education', but in general, students' comments are suggestive of a perception that the principal's student leadership to be of a personal nature. In other words it could be explained as 'it's not what he does, it's more the way that he does it', and, it may be added in an instrumental sense, that it is 'the way that it affects me as an individual'.

This emphasis on the personal attributes of the principal, the emphasis that students place on discovering the personality, the 'who', rather than the 'what' of student leadership is similar to those views referred to earlier in Chapter 2 in the study of Moos et al (1998). Table 2.1 lists those responses from the study of secondary age school students from three countries when asked the question 'what is a good headteacher?' Here it can be seen that the response

phrases from English students are very similar to responses generated by student participants in this study, especially those in Theme 6D, 'Qualities of the Relationship' (Table 6.1) and those in Themes 5B ' Personal Characteristics' and 5C 'Behaviours' (Table 5.1).In both investigations, students are seen to choose personal qualities, rather than more obvious professional competencies including, fairness; listening; and qualities associated with good relationships such as niceness, reliability and approachability.

Taken together then, these suggestions arising from the analysis of the rich data contained in Chapter 4, Themes 4A and 4B, and that from Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, Themes 5B, 5C and 6D, when viewed from the perspective of the theoretical literature of principal effectiveness and the Moos' study of the student perspective of principal effectiveness, indicate that for some students, the principal is seen as having an intentional, instrumental role which has some direct effect on their school experience. This suggestion is a more nuanced view of principal leadership than that usually presented; it is more usually portrayed as being *wholly* mediated through other adults, especially teachers.

7.2 What do Students Perceive to be the Characteristics of Student Leadership?

Leadership practices and behaviours are of many types and as described in Chapter 2 have been categorised into a bewildering range of concepts, causing one researcher to describe leadership by adjective as "a growth industry" (Leithwood et al 2006: 6). Figure 7: 1 however, provides a useful framework for this investigation for identifying the nature of these findings; it also provides me as a practising principal with an underpinning set of operational and strategic principles. In the words of its authors it provides a theoretical glue which offers an explanation for how and why things work as they do and so builds understanding" (Leithwood et al 2006: 32). The flow diagram represents the authors' proposition that leadership practices can be categorised as being located along four 'paths': the emotional, rational, organisational and family.

These are described as “four distinct paths along which the influence of successful leadership practices flow in order to improve student learning” (Leithwood et al 2010: 14).

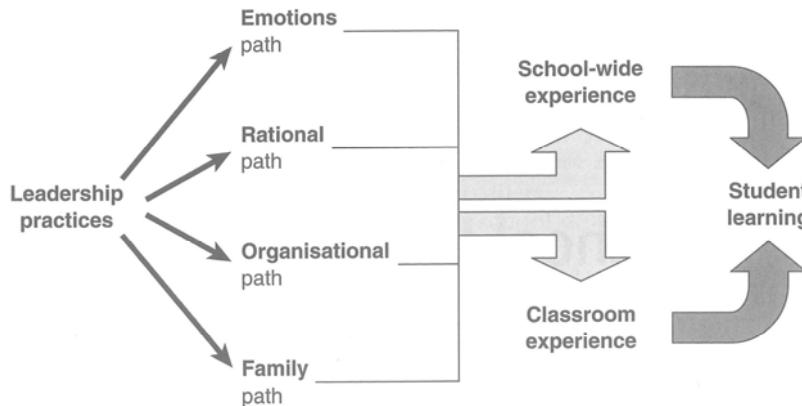


Figure 7: 1: Four paths of leadership influence on student learning (Leithwood et al 2010 in Bush et al 2010:14)

The formulation of these paths is explained by Leithwood et al in a paper reviewing recent educational leadership research over the last 10 years (Leithwood et al 2006). These authors describe their theoretical origins and their genesis “in several different models of transformational leadership” (*ibid*: 19). Other frameworks of what Leithwood et al (2006) describe as *core practices* based on similar assumptions have been described by NCSL (2006), Mongon and Chapman (2008), Day et al (2008). Bush (2008: 10ff) has compiled similar and wider approaches or typologies and identified nine leadership ‘models’. These include managerial, participative, transformational, interpersonal, transactional, postmodern, contingency, moral and instructional practices. It can be seen that the four ‘paths’ identified by Leithwood et al (Figure 7.1) align closely with elements within the nine Bush models. In particular, for the purpose of this discussion, the perspectives that seem to relate most closely to the findings of the study and which contain influential variables for effective students’ leadership appear to be the *emotional* path and the *transformational* and *interpersonal* models.

Both transformational and emotional orientations focus on the relationships between leaders and teachers, equally highlighting the importance of what is

called in the interpersonal model “interpersonal relations” (Tuohy and Coghlan 1997). Leithwood et al recommend that leadership variables on the emotional path are given attention by leaders and suggest that “exercising influence on variables located on the emotional path depends fundamentally on leaders’ social appraisal skills” or emotional intelligence (Leithwood et al 2010:17).

Similarly, Bush quotes West Burnham who after suggesting that ‘interpersonal intelligence is the vital medium’ describes it as “the authentic range of intuitive behaviours derived from sophisticated self-awareness , which facilitates engagement with others” (West Burnham 2001:2).

There is evidence also from organisational leadership studies that leaders do exert influence on the emotional path, for instance, Pirola Merlo et al (2002) and McColl-Kennedy and Anderson (2002) and there seems to be no reason to expect that students, as well as adults, who are the more usual foci of research, are not subject to this emotional influence. Research in this area in educational leadership studies indicate that leaders influence emotions and consequently influence teachers’ sense of self efficacy, job satisfaction, morale and connection to the organisation they work for, for example Blasé (2001), Humphrey (2002), Goddard (2003) and Engels (2008). If it is true as has been suggested that “considerable evidence indicates, for example, that emotions direct cognition: they structure perception, direct attention, give preferential access to certain memories, and bias judgement in ways that help individual respond productively to their environments” (Leithwood et al 2010: 17), then this area of research may prove to be important for principals and headteachers to consider in terms of *student* efficacy, as well as that of teachers’.

Leithwood et al encourage school leaders to direct attention to variables along the emotional path “as a means of improving student learning” (Leithwood et al 2010: 17). There are many student comments analysed in the preceding Chapters, especially Chapter 5, Themes 5B ‘Personal Characteristics: traits’: 5C ‘Behaviours’; and Chapter 6, Theme 6D ‘Qualities of the Relationship’ which point to students’ recognition and appreciation of leadership along this emotional path. Students conceptualise this in terms of the personal qualities or traits they themselves experience as recipients of the principal’s leadership. These are qualities that Goleman (1995) would describe as ‘emotionally

intelligent' and Zaccaro et al (2004) as 'social appraisal skills'. They have been described as "the ability to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of persons including oneself, in interpersonal situations and to act appropriately upon that understanding" (ibid: 52).

Research does suggest that leaders' traits or the skills associated with them connect powerfully with the emotions of followers, leading to the observation that "the management of group members' emotions is a major leadership function" (Humphrey 2002: 499). An interesting finding from this study is that students conceptualise traits in both physical (Theme 5A) and personality (Theme 5B), dimensions. In both instances they describe how each has an effect on the way they feel. These physical qualities which are included in Theme 5A consist of different aspects of appearance, as well as those of voice, manner and demeanour. For instance, students describe how appearance can enhance or hinder student leadership with such detail emerging as the formality associated with suits acting as a barrier in the relationship between principal and student. This has a resonance with leadership research that links emotions with perceptions of leadership. In particular the work of Newcombe and Ashkanazy (2002) demonstrates how the facial expression and body language of leaders are more important factors than the content of the message to followers. In other words the followers' perceptions of the quality of leadership are influenced significantly by external physical attributions. This work is supported by that of Dasborough and Ashkanazy (2002) which demonstrates how "followers will use leaders' emotional displays as key indicators of leaders' intentions and sincerity" (cited in Humphrey 2002: 499).

This observation, which includes the finding that "leaders who gave positive feedback but with negative facial expressions were rated lower than those who gave negative feedback with negative expressions" (Humphrey 2002: 499) seems especially relevant in light of student comments that suggest an incisive level of student observation and conceptualisation of the principal's psyche. Some comments indicate a *meta* cognitive understanding of the relationship. For instance, Bridget's speculative reply when asked whether the principal knew her that "*he might but he don't show it*" (B2) suggests her consideration of *his* mental processes and *his* view of the relationship. Other comments too suggest

that, they like Bridget, speculate about the principal's state of mind and intentions in the relationship. This particularly thoughtful comment by Carol in response to Luke's question asking her how she perceived the role of the principal is illustrative of this *meta* dimension:

"It's how you interpret the job... it's like a part in a play – it's not what character you are, it's what you do with it" (C1).

These comments extend even deeper with students expressing surprisingly sophisticated insights into the man. Like Carol, Nicole talks of her perceiving him to have a "persona" of strictness and control (N2); Jamie refers to him putting on a "big act" from his normal niceness (73), whilst Emma refers to "the mask that just covers him" (115).

This suggestion that students recognise 'genuine-ness' and the indication from the data that they express positive sentiments about communication, being listened to, joining in, being treated with respect and like adults, but give negative views of aloofness, suggest that that they are seeking understanding from the principal's leadership. These qualities could be described as empathetic, with empathy being conceptualised as the desire to understand others' feelings and the ability to do so. This concept contains a wide range of different but related skills but in a review of seven articles linking leadership with emotion, Humphreys finds that the quality most identified with being of value in both task and people oriented leadership, is that of empathy (Humphreys 2002). In one of these articles, Pescosolido (2002) theorizes "that members high in empathy will be more likely to engage in the management of emotions" (Pescosolido 2002: 593) whilst others such as Kellet et al (2002) and Wolf et al (2002) found empathy to be a strong indicator of leadership emergence.

This finding is relevant to this study as these empathetic skills and traits are those which are consistently described by students as key qualities for good student leadership. In particular those of Theme 5B and 5C, which include sub themes of 'Calmness', 'Approachability', and 'Fairness', are emphasised as those valued most by students. These relate closely to those leadership competencies of self awareness and self management described by Goleman

et al (2002: 327), and more especially to competencies which are useful in developing empathetic understanding (*ibid*). These findings would also seem to support the fundamental idea underpinning what its authors describe as a breakthrough concept, 'primal leadership' (Goleman et al (2002)). It is argued that successful leaders create positive resonance in followers through their display of emotion, opening the possibility that if a leader communicates energy and enthusiasm, an organisation thrives; if a leader spreads negativity and dissonance, it flounders.

Amongst these contagious positive qualities would be the references in this investigation coded thematically as traits in action (Table 5:1). These include 'Listening', 'Being Positive', 'Being Reasonable' and the rest contained as Theme 5B. Other qualities closely related, include those in Theme 5C such as 'Pleasantness', 'Approachability' and 'Calmness'. Leithwood et al (2006) in their review of recent literature of leadership effects report that Zaccaro (2004) was able to link variation in these kinds of qualities "with significant differences in leadership success" whilst one of the authors themselves reported evidence of successful principals "being good listeners" (Day et al, 2000 in Leithwood 2006: 80). They conclude that:

"overall, the evidence we reviewed indicates that social intelligence and emotional understanding have a moderate to strong relationship with leadership success" (Leithwood et al 2006: 80).

Within this set of empathetic skills identified by students in this study, by far the most important quality of this kind seems to be the ability to show fairness. In fact this is the largest coding category in the project. As seen in Table 5.1 all 35 students make a comment that is concerned with fairness. In all, 76 references are made to it during the course of the interviews. There are many aspects and nuances to this which have been described in Chapter 5. These include students who see fairness in being treated equally and in an unfavoured manner; not being prejudged by the attitudes and action of brothers and sisters who have gone before; and being listened to personally for their side of the

story as vital features of good leadership. Most of all, however, the greatest unfairness is perceived by well behaved students who do all the right things, yet, seemingly, do not get noticed, praised or recognised; a feeling well expressed by Carol:

“yeah it’s either the ones that are getting A*s by the time they are in Year 8 or if you’re setting fire to something” (C1).

It is worth including two other comments to emphasise the nuance in the tone of these comments. Corinne realises the explanation for being unnoticed is because “we’re general students we don’t normally get noticed” (C3) and her well behaved Council friend Crystal comments that not being noticed makes her “feel a bit neglected” (C4). These comments seem to be referring to the concept of trust and more clearly to its opposite: betrayal. They communicate a message that suggests ‘we have bought in to the dream, listened to what the principal has said about respect, diligence, importance of learning, being part of the school, joining in, doing the right thing’; and yet, in Sara’s words it feels like she is “invisible” (72). The comments suggest that their trust in the words and messages is diminished because after all their efforts they fail to be noticed or known and more importantly see those who misbehave getting noticed much more than them. And when the meaning of these comments, connected together by the concept of fairness, is interpreted as a nuance of trust it becomes linked to the literature investigating how principals' actions play a key role in developing and sustaining relational trust.

Students then appear to perceive the characteristics of the principal's student leadership to be encapsulated in the persona of the principal, and that they make judgements on the quality of the leadership, based on their assessment of his personality and the way they are treated and see other students being treated. There is some indication that students are affected emotionally by aspects of the physical and personal traits.

7.3 What are Students' Perceptions of the Qualities of the Relationship between the Principal and Students?

Research question 3 focuses on the relationship that exists between the principal and his students. It examines the student data presented in Chapter 6, analysed into Themes 6A-6C, which are interpretations of the differing perceptions of the relationship, the value placed on it by students, the comparisons students make between it and their relationship with teachers, and above all, the qualities they perceive within it. The data in this section is examined through the lens of the socio cultural perspective outlined in Chapter 3, with a view to establishing the extent to which the concept of relational trust is apparent from the student data and the way that this might be useful in illuminating the phenomenon of the principal's leadership of students.

This concept of 'relational trust' in schools emerged from the work of Bryk and Schneider (2002). This research investigated the effectiveness of the approach of 'decentralisation with parent empowerment' adopted by Chicago elementary schools to implement reform in the 1990s: from this 'relational trust' was identified as an important variable in school improvement. Schools where it could be identified were likely to improve English and Maths scores up to three times quicker than those where it was lacking. The concept emerged from a sociological perspective and can be described as a form social capital. A fuller discussion of social cultural theory and its related analytical theorisation, activity theory is contained in Chapter 3, as is the emergent concept of social capital building on the work of Coleman (1990) and most significantly from that of Vygotsky (1978). It is from within these perspectives that concepts of reciprocity and trust are emphasised as key components. In this sense the concepts of social and emotional capital may be useful in order to explain why schools function better when members of its community trust one another and how this may have an effect on student outcomes.

The finding that students perceive the principal's leadership to be of a personal kind and describe it in terms of personality more than functionality may stem from their personal construction of the nature of schools, which they perceive

differently from that often described in the research literature. There, schools are usually conceptualised as adult organisational structures with many adult complexities and adult processes, and sometimes without a clear purpose, (Dempster and Bagakis 2008:93) but students seem to view things more simply. Ed's view conveys this well: "the main idea of a school is to do with kids, so you'd think that he should... that should be the priority, the kids" (111). As a consequence, students seem to view their school experience in terms of the relationships they encounter and on the strength of the quality of these, make judgements about its worth, as Duffield et al (2000), and others such as Bleach et al (1996), describe. This student perception of school supports Bryk and Schneider's view that "schools are networks of sustained relationships" (Bryk and Schneider 2003: xiv); this view from a socio/psychological perspective sees school as comprising of a series of relationships, mainly with peers, but also with teachers, and as these participants have shown, also with the principal. It appears that their view of the quality and value of his leadership is seen in terms of the quality of the relationship they see him forming with them and others.

Once again similarities with the comments made by older English students described in the Moos et al study (1998) discussed in Chapter 2 are notable. These students wanted a headteacher that "listens, talks with pupils, is nice/kind to pupils, takes care of pupils, understands pupils, someone you can trust, establishes good relationships, has a sense of humour, is accessible/approachable, doesn't shout at you, is loyal to pupils/ staff" (Moos et al 1998: 61). The authors categorised the qualities identified by the students as those "establishing positive relationships, which for older students is manifestly the most important criterion of good headship. For them the emphasis was almost entirely on the nature of relationships and personal qualities that a good head should exemplify" (*ibid*: 9).

It has been observed already that these observations when "taken together, may be characterised as "establishing positive relationships" (Macbeath and Myers 1998: 9). The findings seem to be closely reminiscent of those which

have emerged from this investigation and consistent with the suggestion in this study, especially those in discussed in Chapter 6, Themes 6 D, ‘Qualities of the Relationship’ that the principal’s leadership of students is conceptualised at a student level and in terms of a personal relationship. Similarly the international research also draws the conclusion that for the students the relationship is “the most important criterion of good headship” (Macbeath and Myers 1999:9).

In light of this, it seems relevant to investigate the connection of the concept to the comments of students in this study, which indicate an expectation of a level of trust in the principal’s student leadership, especially those in Theme 6D and its constituent sub themes ‘Care’, ‘Respect’ and ‘Authority’ (Table 6.1) and those in Theme 5C and the sub themes of ‘Fairness’, ‘Independence from Teachers’ and ‘Leniency’ (Table 5.1). However, Bryk and Schneider’s study does not examine relational trust from the perspective of the students. They are missed out of the research picture entirely, with the authors making the assumption that student teacher trust, presumably just like student /principal trust, would operate through parent/ teacher trust (*ibid*:32). However, the qualities that are identified as engendering trust between the adults in the school community such as transparency, competence, benevolence and reliability are similar to those that student participants in this study describe as being part of good students’ leadership.

Other investigations that have examined the concept of trust as a variable of principal effectiveness have also focused on it from a teacher point of view rather than the students’. These would include Macbeath (1998), Goddard (2003), and most notably Tshannen- Moran (2004). The latter has nevertheless been able to suggest that “principals and teachers earn the trust of their students first and foremost by demonstrating their care. Persuading students and their parents of their understanding good will” (Tschannen-Moran 2004:137). This study, just as Bryk and Schneider’s, aligns student trust with parent trust and cites an example of trust being generated between teacher and parent when the parent is convinced that because the teacher likes her child she will be well cared for. It is a shame that the concepts of trust and care are

not explored with those students and not their parents; as Table 6.1 demonstrates, for the students involved in the current study, the sub theme of ‘Care’ and the responsibility of delivering care to them is perceived by them to be an important feature of ‘student’ leadership’.

This finding, which indicates that students perceive students’ leadership operating at a relational level, which involves trust, suggests the findings from the student data may be of relevance. However, the scope of the current study will only allow the connection to be made rather than provide a deeper investigation. It can only point out that further investigation into the development of trust between principal and students and the effects of this on student learning, may be a fruitful avenue for further studies. In particular, and in view of the nature of these students’ comments it would seem that further investigations into what has been called the “micro dynamics of trust which lie at the core of positive role relationships among those who participate in schools” (Tschannen Moran 2004:138) may prove most useful.

Defining trust as an element that can be consequential in effective schools or effective principal leadership is an insight into schools’ sociological dimensions. From this perspective schools are seen as “networks of sustained relationships” (Bryk and Schneider 2002: xiv). This has been described as “a critical but often overlooked aspect of school reform” because the “social exchanges that occur and how participants infuse them with meaning are central to a school’s functioning” (*ibid*). The framing of schools in this way would seem to be of relevance in exploring ‘student leadership’ which has been described here as an essentially relational phenomenon.

If it can be suggested that relationships and the inference of trusting relationships, are indicated from the student data of themes 5B and 5C, along with those of 6D in particular, and that research literature supports the value of such relationships, then the question can be asked about the nature of the value of the relationship between the *principal* and students. It is here that the ideas of socio cultural theory may be illuminative. For at the heart of Vygotsky’s

theory is the understanding of human cognition and learning as social and cultural rather than as individual phenomena (Kozulin et al 2003). In other words, the relationships that exist in communities such as schools, which in activity theory terms may be considered as activity systems, may be instrumental in developing students' social and emotional capital which may contribute to their social development both individually and collectively.

This idea is supported by literature that does suggest that common to most definitions of social capital are the concepts of generalised trust, as well as reciprocity, for instance, Johnston and Percy-Smith (2003). In other words, individuals behave towards each other with the expectation that they share certain norms and values; they engage in actions which are of benefit to others in the expectation that those actions will be reciprocated at some point in the future and membership of such social networks gives rise to benefits to those with access to them (Johnston and Percy-Smith, 2003).

The relevance of this to this study is that a positive relationship with the principal, as an important significant adult in school, holds the possibility of being affirmative for students. In this sense affirmation is considered to be a feeling of self worth and value. One study in particular, that of Duffield et al (2000), provides this inferential link to the current project. This Scottish study sought to examine how 13-14 year old pupils in Scottish schools viewed their school experience and how they see themselves as learners. The methodological approach, similar to this study, utilised student voice but from the perspective of a school achievement agenda, which they suggest has "been discounted hitherto except as a managerial tool for school self-evaluation" (*ibid*: 263). The paper focuses on the school experience of the students in four key areas. These were: 'what is school about' comparative monitoring; relationships with peers, and of most relevance to this project, relationship with teachers. The main finding was that students viewed their secondary school experience in social rather than pedagogic terms; a view similarly reflected in the work of Dewey who viewed education as a social process within a community (Dewey 1958).

Duffield et al's study found that "relationships with teachers were crucial" with students agreeing that the best teachers combined fun with work. The students also indicated that the relationship with their teachers directly affected the effort they were able to make, with the authors concluding that "teachers' affirmation enabled effort and application not possible before."(Duffield et al 2000: 272). This conclusion that student teacher relations are an important factor in student outcomes has been supported by more recent findings. The recent large scale meta analysis of research identifying factors that affect student learning outcomes carried out by Hattie, found that the relationship between teacher and student to be important. In fact it was deemed to have one of the higher co - relational factors in the survey $d=0.72$ (Hattie 2009: 81).

But an interesting difference is evident between the Scottish study and one of the findings from this project. Although describing their relationship with teachers and not the principal, the Scottish 'low achiever' students have a much less positive relationship with their teachers than other students. Some claim "never to have received public praise" (Duffield 2000: 269) and others describe what the author terms "failures of communication" (*ibid*: 270) with their teachers. This finding would seem to be the reverse of the indication in this study. Here, the suggestion elucidated in Chapter 5, Theme 5C, 'Behaviours', especially the sub themes of 'Leniency' and 'Getting involved with Students' and Chapter 6, Theme 6D, 'Qualities of the Relationship' is that similar students to the 'low achievers', the Behaviour group, find relationships with the principal easier and that it is the higher achievers such as the Council students, that comment more negatively.

This may be a finding for future research to pursue but as the Scottish study does not examine principal/ student relationships and this study only examines teacher /student relationships in passing, perhaps all that can be assumed from this observation is that the relationship between teachers and students and principal and students, is of a different nature, whether in Scottish or English schools. What the study does confirm, however, is that the relationship with teachers in Duffield et al's study is seen as social and relational rather than

pedagogical. In other words, students comment about how it makes them feel rather than what it means in instructional or pedagogical terms; a finding similar to what the students' comments in this study appear to indicate about their relationship with teachers and with the principal.

Nevertheless, despite both relationships being described in this way, the analysis in Theme 6C, Chapter 6, 'the Relationship with Teachers', students' comments appear to suggest an even greater perception of a personal relationship with teachers than with the principal. Students perceive that teachers talk to them more, that they know their teachers better and the teachers know them better; that the relationship is more personal and that teachers deal with incidents differently because they know students better. But the similarity between the relationship with the principal and the relationship with teachers as demonstrated here and in Duffield et al, is the sense of importance given to how both relationships makes them *feel* rather than how they affect them academically. But there may be a further suggestion present in the meaning of some students' comments about their relationship with teachers that indicates a deeper effect of their relationship with the principal. This is the indication that the principal's student leadership has an effect on their relationship with teachers.

This emerges from the finding in Chapter 5 that students expect the principal to act and to be independent from their teachers. Students like Kevin view one of the principal's roles to be the independent arbiter in disputes between students and teachers. His comment that "I've been in like situations where I've been punished and I don't think it's fair and I've wanted to speak to Mr Blue – cos he's like the boss" and Sally's advice that "if you don't have a nice teacher you can go to someone else (Mr Blue)" (74) indicate this trusting belief in the principal to ensure that they are treated fairly. In a similar way, comments such as Nick's observation that "teachers completely change their teaching style when he comes into the room" (N4) convey an understanding that the principal's student leadership carries over into an effect on their relationship with teachers.

It could be hypothesised that this effect of the principal's intervention with teachers and its conception as an influential factor in their relationship with teachers may be a factor in ensuring a positive classroom climate with effects at this level having been identified as significant to student achievement. Hattie's meta analysis of factors that make a difference to student outcomes (Hattie 2009) highlights the importance of such classroom level phenomena. For instance, two of them, teachers providing students with immediate and informative feedback ($d=0.73$), and teachers' use of reciprocal teaching strategies ($d=0.74$), have the highest co relational factors to student outcomes. So can these findings that suggest that students perceive principal leadership and teacher leadership at a relational affective level rather than an instructional level, connect this kind of leadership to student learning?

When viewed from the social capital perspective outlined in Chapter 3 and above, these relationships that are hinted at between teachers and students, and the principal's role in ensuring that teachers treat students fairly, as well as the relationship between students and principal, may be indicative of the suggestion that membership of such relational networks are beneficial to students. Furthermore there may be suggestions from literature that the relationship with the principal in student leadership has the potential to engage students more fully in the school learning experience by making them feel more affiliated to the school community. Links between particular leadership perspectives such as transformational (Leithwood and Jantzi 1999, Silins and Mulford 2002), instructional (Quinn 2002) and even 'venturesome' (VanderStoep et al 1993) and student engagement have been previously been explored in the literature with varying, but generally limited, success.

The concept of school engagement is complex according to Fredericks et al (2004); these researchers illustrate how similar constructs such as motivation, sense of belonging, identification, and adjustment have come to represent aspects of engagement and consequently they propose it as a multifaceted

concept. But if the principal's leadership of students is seen to have any effect on students' school experience and their learning, then engagement with the school is an important concept for this study. It has been demonstrated that students in the study attach significance to 'being known' by the principal and how this can elicit emotional responses such as feelings of pride and motivation. This connects with the suggestion of how this sense of being known, this sense of belonging, "can influence achievement through its effects on engagement" (Macbeath and Myers 1999) and of others such as Epstein and McPartland (1976), and Fredericks et al (2004, especially 64ff), who also point out the positive effects of student engagement and in the latter case, the mediating effects of engagement on other curriculum reform.

In its multifaceted form, research into engagement would seem to include that of Osterman (2000) who explores the concept of student belonging or student relatedness to school. She reviews literature on motivation from a psychological perspective and the theoretical assumption that individuals "have psychological needs, that satisfaction of these needs affects perception and behaviour(sic) and that characteristics of the social context influence how well these needs are met" (Osterman 2000: 323). She finds that the research strongly suggests that, along with autonomy and competence, 'relatedness', a sense of belonging to a community, is one of three basic psychological needs "that are essential to human growth and development" (*ibid*: 327). Her extensive review of empirically based research concludes that the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation; she then continues to examine how this relates to the experience of school students in their relationships with adults and peers in home and school.

The review is structured to examine the links between the students' experience of 'relatedness' or 'belonging' or 'sense of community', to five outcomes of relevance in schools. These are: the development of basic psychological processes important to student success; academic attitudes and motives; social and personal attitudes; engagement and participation; and academic achievement. The findings from the research literature, to a greater or lesser

extent, confirms that students who experience a greater sense of belonging, who feel accepted into the school community by peers and by adults, especially teachers, have more positive outcomes in each of these areas than their peers who feel excluded. In short, Osterman concludes that "connection and affiliation is crucial" and that "students' experience of acceptance is associated with a positive orientation toward school, class work and teachers" (Osterman 2000:331).

This conclusion supports the research of others such as Ma (2003) that the sense of belonging is important to student achievement. It also supports research that demonstrates that relationships with adults in school are important to students, for example, Duffield et al (2000), Humphreys (2000), Fredericks (2004). Silins and Mulford also report that "teacher and student relationships are critical to promoting student engagement with school and learning" and go on to describe how "in addition students appreciate the teachers who make them feel valued and cared about as individuals in the same way as teachers appreciate the leadership who make them feel valued and supported" (Silins and Mulford 2002:443). When viewed from this perspective those comments from students which describe the very positive effects on them of being known and feeling valued by the principal, in Chapter 4, theme 4A, sub theme 'Being known' and 'Not Being known' may be seen to be examples of an instrumental process leading to a sense of belonging. However, in the same light, those comments from students who claim to experience no leadership from the principal and which are categorised under the code, '*the man in the shadow*', Chapter 4, could be describing a feeling of a lack of involvement in the community and a lack of relatedness.

This '*man in the shadow*' conceptualisation with its negative connotations of the principal's student leadership, connects to the finding that there is a discernible difference between the Behaviour students' perceptions of the principal's student leadership and that of Council group. From the analysis discussed in Chapter 4 and evidenced in Table 4.1 it is clear that Council group students are less positive than Behaviour students about the principal's student leadership.

Although the scope of the study does not allow for a full analysis of different group responses for each thematic coding, this is probably material for a further investigation, it does allow for a perceptual view of emerging significant issues of difference. My initial exploration of this issue arose after a conversation with Luke alerted to me to what he called different tones within the group responses. A reading of the transcriptions for both groups as an unbroken naturalistic narrative did indeed offer support for Luke's interpretation. In particular he mentions a generally negative accusatory attitude from amongst the Council students, which contrasts with the positive, lighter, tone of the Behaviour Group (see Appendix 1).

This difference is probably best observed in the analysis of comments about fairness in Chapter 5 and noted above. The essence of the negativity from the Council group lies in the perception that they are not noticed as much as those who do not behave, the Behaviour Group. Charles sums up this sentiment describing the group he belongs to as being "in the middle... verging off the middle... it's just like – what's the point in being good if you don't get noticed.... All the bad people get noticed so what's the point" (C3). This seems to colour their view of the principal's student leadership significantly. On the other hand, although students from the Behaviour group complain about teachers being treated better than them and them being picked up for breaches of the uniform code and other incidents, they have many more positive comments to add about the principal's leadership. The analysis in Chapter 6 illustrates this with several examples which even suggest that comments from the principal might even make them change their behaviour. This comment from Belle offers a good sense of this less critical and warmer tone towards the principal:

"Cos if you're good all the time yeah... they don't notice it, but if you're bad and you're doing quite well they notice it more" (B5).

There could be many reasons for the difference in the tone. For instance, the Behaviour group students would have more dealings with Luke, whereas the Council students would have been less well known to him and hence feel less at ease; Luke's perceptions of the tone may have been affected by his

closeness to the Behaviour group but the fact that many of the comments that refer to the principal as the man in the shadow with few from the Behaviour group, does suggest a more resentful inclination.

If the assumption can be made that the relationship between the principal and the Behaviour students is surprisingly more positive than would be expected and that this is highlighted more sharply by the contrast with the better behaved students, can any other research findings illuminate this? Both Focus Groups were selected heuristically in terms of attitude. The Council group self selected as positive students because of their voluntary and elective participation in the college Council, and the Behaviour group, as negative students because of the higher than normal number of recorded behaviour incidents. No consideration was given to any other criteria for selection other than a balance of gender in the group. Consequently no authentic comparison can be made with most of the literature of principal effects on different groups of students. This has tended to focus mostly on gender, race and socio economic status rather than attitude to school, for instance, Mortimore (1993), Marshall (1996) and Scheurich (1998). However, a review of some of this current literature contained in Leithwood et al (2006: 100ff), which examined the effects of family social educational culture and social capital on pupil learning from the perspective of leadership practices, draws a synthesis which may illuminate these findings from this study.

After analysing the literature through these sociological lenses the authors suggest “whilst the empirical evidence is quite thin” (*ibid*: 104) it shows that successful leaders adopt a series of strategies, which, amongst others include: providing a fairly assertive and positive form of leadership; shaping their practices around an ethic of care, and interacting with pupils directly and as frequently as possible. These findings stand out because they align very closely with findings from this study. For instance ‘assertive and positive form of leadership’ appears to link closely to Table 4:1, Theme A sub themes ‘The man in Charge’ and ‘The Teachers’ Leader’; and Table 6:1, Theme D sub themes ‘Respect’ and ‘Authority’; “an ethic of care” also links to Table 6:1 Theme D sub

theme ‘Care’ whilst “contact with students” appears a similar concept to Table 5:1, Theme 5C sub themes, ‘Getting Involved with Students’ and ‘Involving Students’. All are perceived by students from across all groups to be worthwhile elements of student leadership. As mentioned above these suggestions cannot be convincingly linked to groups of students but in this mixed semi urban comprehensive school with an above average FSM eligibility, the student profile will certainly contain significant numbers with low SES, and low family educational aspirations.

These findings from literature within the sociological perspective reported above, when viewed through the lens of a socio cultural perspective and the related concept of social capital, certainly begin to make sense of the findings from the study. The data in support of sub themes ‘Fairness’, ‘Care’, ‘Respect’, ‘Being involved’, ‘Authority’ in Theme 5 are those similar to those identified in Table 6;1 which indicate relational qualities and give clear illumination to the question posed in Question 3 about the nature of the relationship that exists between the principal and his students. The relationship is important and carries emotional connotations which are reflective of a human need for connectedness and may be explained in terms of the quality of relational trust as a component of social capital.

These answers are now considered in relation to the main research topic with conclusions being drawn about the study’s limitations, contribution to knowledge of principal effectiveness and future implications and directions for research.

Chapter 8

Conclusions, Reflections, Limitations and Future Directions

"And I think if we had a really bad headmaster then we wouldn't have a good education and we would like end up losing the world as it is" (Sara, 72)

8.1. The Research Focus

This research has focused on illuminating the concept of a principal's leadership of students. It is a study about effective school leadership with particular reference to the leadership of the principal as it is viewed through the eyes of his students. The aim has been to explore students' perceptions of this phenomenon and to discover how they conceptualise it, what it comprises of, and to seek suggestions as to how it works and how it might have an effect on students' school experience. It is from within this perspective, the perspective of students, that one of the study's original and distinctive contributions to knowledge might be found.

8.2. Contribution to Knowledge 1: The Students' Voice, the Insider Perspective

In a field dominated by outsider research, this study's utilisation of 'student voice' to illuminate an aspect of a principal's leadership, is able to offer some original insights from this insider perspective of both researcher and student. For instance, a distinct but still suggestive hypothesis, that students such as Sara (72), above, perceive the principal as being the seat of leadership and as having real power which can affect their school experience, -'the man in charge', 'the teachers' leader', Theme 4A, and 'checking up', 'managing' and 'education' ,Theme 4B,-might be a useful observation in the field of principal effectiveness research that currently focuses almost exclusively on the mediated nature of principal effects.

This *student* understanding of the nature of the principal's leadership appears to convey a conceptualisation of leadership as being situated in an individual at the top of an organisational hierarchical structure and carrying power and authority. This concept ('Authority', Theme 6D) as described by students, which appears to occupy a significant place in the students' understanding of principal leadership, is described by them in two senses. The first is from a personal perspective: the way the authority of the principal affects them in making the rules, checking up on them and telling them what uniform to wear. This seems to be understood and accepted but only when it is exercised with fairness and reasonableness. The second way that authority is perceived is what a follower of Thomas Hobbes might describe as 'detached authority' (*Leviathan*). In this sense authority is seen as de personalised or abstract such as in the 'authority of the state', and is viewed as being more powerful than that contained in the personality of the principal, whose humanness makes his authority that little bit more debateable. This too appears to be welcomed and expected by students. It is this type of authority that students refer to as the 'natural order' (112) and 'human nature' (115) when describing how they understand the principal's leadership. Their comments about the 'man at the top' carry inferences of reassurance and security that comes with this understanding of leadership and it may not be too fanciful to suggest that for some their conceptualisation of principal leadership offers a representation of benign yet clear authority that could be lacking elsewhere in their experience.

The perspective from the student voice then suggests that generally students do not conceptualise the principal as a peripheral figure. Even those who describe his persona as '*a man in the shadow*' (eg N4 and 115) also express a desire for him to be involved, visible and active with them – Table 5:1,Theme 5C, sub themes 'Getting involved with Students' 'Involving Students more'. Along with this perception of the position of primacy however, comes the responsibility to 'Listen', to act with 'Fairness', to be 'Independent of Teachers' and to be 'Lenient' (Theme 5C). It is in these areas that students say personal qualities count; these may be described as relationally oriented, emotionally intelligent or good people skills, but if it is to be accepted that effective leadership means "sustaining those relationships within a community in which

all its members are heard, and taken account of" (Macbeath 1998:147) then the student voices expressing themselves here are indicating that relationships in school, including the relationship with the principal and the personal qualities that sustain them, can be consequential. This is the paradigm of leadership already described by Andy Hargreaves (p 54) and emphasised here, the one that on reflection seems to underpin and sustain my professional belief, that which "emphasises the capability of the school leader to sustain relationships...and puts the heart and emotions of teaching at the centre" (Hargreaves 1997 in Macbeath 1998:147)

Contribution to Knowledge 2: Making Sense from a Socio Cultural Perspective

From a theoretical perspective the suggested hypothesis described above that students conceptualise, perceive, value and assess the principal's leadership in relational terms may be made sense of when viewed from a socio cultural perspective and especially with the concept of social capital in mind. Although some authors, for example, Johnston & Percy-Smith (2003) suggest there is little agreement on what it is, where it comes from and how it can be measured, social capital may be useful in order to explain the nature of the principal's student leadership.

Although the relationship with the data may be only suggestive rather than certain there are indications in the comments from each of the sub themes of Theme 6B 'Being known' that would suggest that the principal's student leadership can be viewed as contributing to the social capital building that students experience at school. In particular those comments in the sub theme 'It feels good to be Known' express very strongly an affirmative positive feeling in response to being known in contrast to those in the sub theme 'Not Being Known'. Some students go on to describe a motivating effect that even acknowledgement from the principal can bring, whilst the opposite of this is described by others who suspect they are not known or see others being known for the wrong reasons.

The value of the relationship in social capital terms might also be indicated in the concepts of ‘Care’ and ‘Respect’ as part of Theme 6D. For some students the principal is seen as a caring figure, (sub theme ‘Care’), and for some, a figure they can trust, (sub theme ‘Independent from Teachers’ and ‘Fairness’) and although the relationship may not be the deeper kind that is described by students with their teachers in Theme 6D ‘Relationships with Teachers’ it still appears to carry significance. Student data certainly seem to connect it to a sense of belonging, for instance, Theme 6B ‘Being Known’ sub themes ‘It Feels Good to be Known’, ‘It Motivates’; and this affective quality “this feeling of belonging” appears to be necessary for successful learning and for more general well-being” Warnock (2005: 15). Perhaps it could even be suggested that there may be a longer lasting benefit to well being from this accrual of social capital. For instance, Bourdieu (1986) suggests that social cultural capital can be found in what he terms ‘the embodied state’, namely in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body and it is perhaps as a contributory factor, even if limited, in the creation of a long lasting affirmative disposition that the principal’s student leadership may be of consequence.

8.4. Four Reflections and Implications for Practice

Often it has felt that my research project could best be described in the words of Brown and Dowling:

“our own experience of research is that it is difficult and frustrating and that it takes a lot of time and causes a lot of tears. But eventually, it can generate ways of looking at the world which you didn’t have before and which can motivate real developments in your professional practice as well as spur you on to further research activity” (Brown and Dowling 1998:1)

All of these things have been true at some stage in the process but especially the observation that it “can motivate real developments in your professional activity.” This research investigation as part of a professional doctorate designed to inform my professional practice has certainly provided opportunities for reflection and insights into what I and other school leaders do. Here are four.

1 Leadership of students has been identified for me as an important aspect of my leadership practices. Its importance lies not only in the meaning that students give to it, but I now recognise that it forms part of my understanding of the context of my school. It is a large part of my intelligence gathering function which provides me with information about what is working and what needs to be done. Leadership of students forms part of what has been called “leadership acts...which most influence what information is used, and how it is used” (Allix and Gronn 2005: 189). And more than this it provides my reference points for progress, my goals for the school and the strategies to reach them. These are shaped by the face to face interactions, the leadership of students, as much as any other driving force. If the school is about children and getting the best for them then leading them is the best way to ensure that the direction is set correctly.

2 Being the principal and researcher has meant that this investigation has taken the form of an ongoing action research project. This was not a piece of action research but it was impossible to ignore the data as they emerged, and they inevitably shaped and altered my practice. What was impossible to ignore were comments like Crystal’s who observed that “all he cares about is the school, not the students” (C4) and the discovery that a body of students, the well behaved, felt invisible, ignored and unfairly treated. Consequently, a whole series of measures at school level and behaviours at my level have changed as a result. Here are a few. For instance, a new ‘Behaviour Code’, based on rewards rather than sanctions, with praise rewards, reward trips and reward lunches with the principal was introduced to acknowledge and recognise the unheard and unnoticed. There are more opportunities for student voice to be heard and I now teach, and all senior leadership team members teach. I meet well behaved students as often as possible and leave more disciplinary matters to others. When I am involved in disciplinary incidents I always listen to both sides of the story and give opportunity to students to explain as well as teachers. I do not shout anymore.

Most of all I attempt to see things from a student perspective. The findings elicited from the student voice made clear how assumptions I have about my practice can be seen differently by students. What I considered to be supportive behaviours such as viewing concerts and attending other events, and appearing in public were seen by students as opportunities for personal glory. My strategy of being in places where students would see me, such as in the dining hall, in the corridors and public spaces, were viewed with suspicion and opportunities to check up on them. I still do these things but make sure I speak with students more and have positive conversations about learning and school experience. I have realised, like Nathan said to Luke, that “adults don’t see it like we do” (N1)

3 Investigating leadership of students as one aspect of my leadership behaviours has thrown my other practices into sharper relief. It has been observed that “principals like everybody else have a tendency to react in line with their concept of “every day consciousness” (Moos and Moller 2003: 367); but now I feel my concept of every day consciousness has expanded considerably. Researching this set of practices and identifying it as a distinct group has helped me to clarify and iterate other practices and to give them relative values: this was a key objective of the project; to understand better my own leadership practice. I now feel I have a better theoretical perspective on what I am doing and what is successful. I now use Leithwood et al’s model of four paths to categorise my practices and structure my leadership meetings. I can now see more clearly how, for example, a previous strategy of restructuring the school day to increase engaged learning time fits with research showing effective leadership practices along the organisational path . I can also see how I have consciously and unconsciously set about engendering trust amongst teachers and increasing their ‘Collective Teacher Efficacy’ and recognise the value of my constant focus on setting a direction and buffering teachers from outside distractions and aligning school with outside policy. Something has been iterated in my mind, something that wasn’t there before.

Much of this confirms that my leadership and successful leadership practices are in the emotional and relational dimensions. It feels to be true that effective leadership is as much about who you are, than what you know or what you can do. This is why my leadership of students has felt itself to be important and why it has always felt to be no different from my leadership of staff. They are both carried out in the same manner with the same set of emotionally intelligent skills. Student assemblies, just as staff conferences, and staff briefings, the corridor conversations with staff and students, are similar in kind and can have similar effects. Whether with staff or students these interactions are part of the “human side of leadership practices” (Barker 2001:66) which can influence staff and students and convince them both that the direction and goals being set for them and the school are worth assimilating as their own.

8.5. Limitations

The potential limitations of the study are acknowledged. Firstly, it focuses on a limited sample of students whose responses reflect the very individual contexts in which they come into contact with the principal; and findings which are based on participants’ personal experiences, as Crotty (1998) emphasises, can only be suggestive, not conclusive. Secondly, and connected, is the perceptive nature of the data and its more problematic validity versus objective measures. Thirdly, the concept being investigated is hard to find; there is no research literature in which it has been identified or tested as a variable which might have an effect on student learning, leaving it void of quantitative evidence to give it credence. The research however aims to provide naturalistic evidence from individuals which both constructs and illuminates the concept at the same time. In this way, although recognising that no absolute answers to its nature or its effects will be found (Lichtman 2006), its central endeavour, which is to understand an experience within the “subjective world of human experience” (Morrison 2002:22) can be met.

8.6. Future Directions

The study has successfully met one of its objectives which is to help me to understand my own practice, but has it contributed in any way to the general knowledge about what successful principals do? The reader will form their own opinion of the value of a small Case Study adding to the field of knowledge but as both researcher and practising principal my answer would be affirmative, but perhaps with limitations and perhaps only for those who want to listen. For this study was never designed to investigate and connect a particular set of leadership behaviours with particular outcomes for students as much of leadership research attempts to do. As acknowledged above, the only measure that indicates success on the part of this principal is that the students in his two schools have achieved good results at GCSE in attainment and value added measures over a sustained period. But as I constantly remind staff the reasons behind this are numerous and complex and it is the synergistic effects of many initiatives and strategies that together make the difference, not one thing in isolation from another. Above all, I make clear to staff that it is the adults, teachers, and others who make the difference in the face to face interactions in the classroom where the learning takes place, where the magic happens.

Duffield et al point out that most interventions from governments and it may be added research investigations, into what makes a difference to student outcomes, focus on whole school and teacher interventions “with the assumption that intervention at this level would lead to pupils learning more effectively” (Duffield et al 2000:271). But what the study has attempted, unlike many others, is to begin to probe students’ perceptions of what might be one element that contributes to their success amongst many others. And investigations at this pupil level are rare. These authors observe that “the pupil testimony is not privileged as more ‘true’ than the accounts of teachers and advisers, but it provides a crucial element still too often overlooked” (*ibid*: 270). This feature of the project might prove to be its value in the field of principal effectiveness research.

Practising principals may need to examine their own practice in light of these findings. They may need to ask themselves questions that were posed at the

start of this investigation and check whether they do spend enough time with students and are they making sure that those well behaved students are receiving their fair share of attention from the principal. They may recognise that students trust the principal to deliver many things, but above all, to make sure they get treated fairly by teachers and to make sure that there is someone they can trust at the top of the organisation. They may decide that it could make a difference to the way all students feel about the school and their learning experience; they may feel, like me, that they have a role to play in creating that sense of belonging, that sense of “connection and affiliation” which Osterman (2000) describes as being “crucial”.

For future researchers and policy makers the suggestion once more that emotional qualities play a significant role in delivering successful school leadership, this time from another set of recipients or consumers of it, the students, needs to be recognised. A future research design involving students from other sectors of education and employing quantitative methodologies might focus more directly on linking these emotional qualities to particular aspects of the students’ experience and their outcomes. For those involved in principal selection panels, and why not students as a matter of course, greater emphasis on candidates’ emotional qualities rather than technical competencies and knowledge might ensure better leadership outcomes. This would be equally valuable as a focus for leadership CPD and qualifications such as NPQH: the paradigm of emotionally aware and relationally focused leadership may hold a key to understanding why some school leaders are more effective than others.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Luke's accounts of Focus Group interviews

Year 7 students

The Year 7 felt it was very important that the head teacher listens – they felt Mr Blue does. They seemed to find it hard to disassociate the Head teacher with the rules e.g. Uniform – they seem to feel it is Mr Blue putting his stamp on them, rather than being a rule that promotes equality.

They felt a bad head teacher has no control and they like rules/knowing where they are with a head teacher.

They thought he was a 'normal person' who chats with students and staff.

Uniform and shoes were huge issues to them. It was hard to keep them on point at times, they would go off on tangents about them, and so it was a constant task to keep them focused on the issue in hand.

They were largely positive about Mr Blue and recognised that he was important to them, not just by helping them in lessons, but also by recruiting the best staff for them. They felt he listened to them on topics such as the school blazer. The students also valued the fact he provided additional support to students who needed it, such as TRACs/TLC. Even students who didn't use these facilities acknowledged the help they gave other students.

The students recognised that they need a head teacher, not only for them, but also for staff. They were positive about his role with other staff and seemed to realise that his main priority is the students.

The students who took part were lively and excited about the chance to air their views. As previously mentioned there were times where we drifted from the point with uniform etc., but this seemed to be a huge issue for them and one which they strongly linked with Mr Blue. They were honest students who spoke what they thought, but with them still being fairly immature at eleven and twelve years old, I think there may have been times when they went too far for effect with their peers.

They had respect for Mr Blue and I think the quote that summed up their view of him for me was the analogy of the human body... ‘Teachers are like the organs and Mr Blue is the heart that keeps it all moving’. I thought it was interesting that they chose heart, with its emotional connotations, rather than head or brain!

Students Known

These students wanted a head to be someone approachable who communicates well with them. They were largely very positive about Mr Blue and noted the fact that he praised them if they had done well. They too mentioned uniform, but to not such an extent as the Year 7 and seemed to realise it was necessary. Some of the students had been involved in disruptive behaviour before and this is why they were known to Mr Blue; they commented that if they had been told off by Mr Blue they had the chance to talk to him afterwards to sort things out – something they really appreciated.

They were quite realistic in their impressions of Mr Blue’s role. They said that although they didn’t see him out around the site much, it was probably because they were in lessons so wouldn’t see him! They had quite a mature viewpoint on this and acknowledged that he would have to do work away from students as well as with them. They also noted that a Head’s job was keeping staff in order and running smoothly – which then has knock-on effects for them.

Some of the students taking part in the interviews had been directly affected by Mr Blue’s decision to open up more vocational courses for them – they appreciated this and were grateful for the chance they had been given.

They did feel that Mr Blue knew A*/high achieving students or ‘naughty’ ones and that perhaps the majority of students were a little more distanced.

College Council

These students had a fairly negative perception of a head’s role and were fairly cynical in their views about what a head does and what they should do. They felt the head only really knew people who were trouble makers – ‘he only knows

your name if you've been in trouble'. I don't really know why they were negative in this respect as I knew that Mr Blue knew at least three of them fairly well, but it was their perception. I wonder if this was related to fact they were in the College Council and possibly felt some resentment about not being listened to enough – even though I know the Council was viewed in high regard by Mr Blue.

The College Council students felt that they mainly saw Mr Blue telling off students who had done something wrong or showing visitors around the site. They did acknowledge that Mr Blue fought for the best facilities for them and changed the school uniform to what they wanted as students, rather than what they felt the governors had wanted. They also commented that Mr Blue was always very polite to them.

As with all groups I got the impression that all students liked and respected Mr Blue as a person, but at times resented his role and felt his 'suit was like shield'. But although negative at times the group noted that people listened when Mr Blue spoke and he was like the 'father of the school'. This made me think that they viewed him with affection by referring to him as 'father' as opposed to 'boss' or 'leader'. They also commented that they would love to have praise from Mr Blue personally, again perhaps showing a foundation of respect and admiration – otherwise why would they want it?

On a negative note, they felt like they were in the 'middle' so did not particularly stand out for attention from Mr Blue, but did make an interesting comment that he was like a football club manager, rather than a coach – I took this to mean he had the bigger picture and perhaps this was an acknowledgement from the students about how large a head's remit and workload is.

Students Not Known

These students started off in a similar manner to the College Council – with a fairly negative view of a head's job – he only really deals with 'naughty' students. At the start of the interview I found some of their comments slightly jarring with my own perception. I say this because they commented that Mr Blue needed to be 'about the place or he doesn't know his school'. From my

perception Mr Blue was frequently out and about, but the students did not see this. Again, I wonder if there was some resentment from the students, as perhaps they wished they had more of a relationship with Mr Blue as they later acknowledged how valued they felt when he watched their musical concerts or drama performances.

At the start of the interview, there seemed to be a slight frostiness when talking about a head's role – they felt he just walked down to the canteen lunchtimes then when back to his office. They also commented that at times they felt he was trying to claim the glory of student's achievements for himself or the school – such as the time a student was award a scholarship with a local football club. They didn't seem to think that a head could be genuinely proud of a student or students' achievement without an ulterior motive.

In further discussion they seemed to warm more towards the head's role and noted that at times perhaps it was the 'stigma' of the 'head's role' itself that created a negative impression on them. They commented on how they would really value a personal relationship with the head - so do value the work he does and his position. They also said how they would like that chance to build that relationship by being taught by the head.

Overall, I felt this interview started on a fairly negative note, but ended on a positive one, with students possibly just wishing they had a closer relationship with Mr Blue and being envious of those students who they perceived he was closer to.

Behaviour Students

At the start of the interview with the 'behaviour students' it was clear they did not like rules! They were unhappy about uniform and phone policies, but did understand they need to have rules in school. They were largely positive about the head and said that he praised them when they did well and sanctioned them when they did something wrong. They commented that they enjoyed seeing him and having a relationship with him and also said that they listened to what he said. They generally seemed to have a lot of respect for Mr Blue.

All of the students in this group had issues with their behaviour in school and had been through the school systems for behaviour. Instead of resenting this they seemed pleased they were being cared for, although noted that it could be unfair that 'naughty' students are given more attention than 'good' students. The students felt they could see the head if they had a problem – 'anytime I need to talk to someone I can go to him'.

As with other groups they felt it was important for the Head to be out and about and a presence in school. The behaviour group did not seem to realise that he may have other things to do in his role as head of the school. Again, as with other groups, they wanted to see more of him and possibly be taught by him.

They were positive about the role of the head throughout the interview and commented how he is like the schools Ofsted report – 'Good with outstanding features'! I really think the students appreciated that Mr Blue worked for them and gave them the time if they needed it.

The group were a bit challenging at times, as like the Year 7 they could drift off the point, but on the whole, considering they were all students who at one time or another were possibly in-line for PEX I felt they gave good solid views and genuinely had respect for the Head and his school.

Year 11 students

The students were interviewed a week or two before they left for study leave. I think this gave them a real freedom to say what they truly felt and also gave them the chance to summarise their views of the school, in which Mr Blue had been the principal throughout.

A strong theme throughout the interview was fairness. They felt it was important that a head was fair to students and had a democratic approach to things. One student commented that he should use his best judgement to decide things after he had discussed it with others.

The students had a mature and reasoned view of the headteacher relationship and believed that respect was very important. They saw this from both sides

and felt that a head had to earn respect, just as they had to earn respect from him.

They acknowledged the support they received from the Head – things such as watching performances, concerts, sporting fixtures and public speaking events. They also really seemed to want to make him ‘proud’ of them.

Some students still felt the title and role of the head was slightly intimidating and perhaps this made them feel a bit distant from him at times.

The Year 11 students appeared to have a more realistic view of the head’s role and perhaps did not take quite so much to heart, the fact that he did not know some of them as much as they would have liked - ‘I think if you knew what he did and stuff like that, then you’d appreciate him a lot more’.

They really seemed to want to have a relationship with Mr Blue on a personal level – even to the point where one of the students said he would like to go for a drink with him! Whilst this was a slightly tongue-in-cheek comment, it still goes to prove that the students were keen to be seen as equal to Mr Blue and would value the chance to know him as a friend or perhaps more aptly as a ‘colleague’.

The students were largely positive about the role of a head and recognised some of the pressures they would face. I believe they appreciated the head they had and although there were things they might like to have changed, they were grateful for the support they had received over their five years in the school.

Appendix 2: Luke’s selection of the Focus Group Students

“I initially verbally sounded out students individually and asked if they would be willing to take part. None of the students knew the others that would be taking part until they arrived in the room I used for interviews. It was made clear to the students what the interview was for and that all their views and opinions would have no bearing on their relationship with the head and were entirely separate from school life. I explained to every student that Mr Blue was working towards a Doctorate and he had chosen this project and asked me to help conduct the interviews, so students felt reassured about having the chance to speak without

restriction. No student expressed any concern and were keen to take part. All students accepted this and were pleased to know that they would have the chance to express themselves entirely freely. As previously mentioned, my role in the school was very broad and I believe that my relationship with the students allowed for an atmosphere of trust and freedom to say what they honestly felt without fear of retribution or involvement from the head or anyone else in school.

Students were explained the purpose of the interviews initially, completed a consent form (1) which was co-signed by their parent or guardian before the interview, and were again reminded of the purpose before the interviews took place.

The interviews were held in the school 'late-school' room, which was arranged with a table in the middle and chairs around so we were all facing each other. I sat with the students and we had the recording apparatus in the middle of the table. Students all had the option to leave at any stage of the process if they wished and all confirmed they wanted to take part before the interviews started.

Most interviews happened in the afternoon, straight after lunch, this allowed us just over two hours, if we needed them, although most interviews took 40 to 70 mins. I was the only member of staff who knew what the interviews were about and why they were conducted.

Students missed lessons to take part in the interviews, but I cleared this with their teachers and none were penalised for missing work. I did toy with the idea of doing the interviews after-school, but the logistics of trying to get a good cross-section of each group after school would have been a struggle – some students had buses to catch, jobs to go to, fixtures to play, music lessons etc.

Notes:

- (1) The consent form was the Exeter University ethical consent form which was downloaded from the University website with my supervisor's agreement. The form is available at

<http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/students/index.php>

Appendix 2: Initial Exploration of the Idea of Luke Being Involved in the Project

Sent 17th June 2009

Hi [REDACTED]

Sorry my rather long email didn't reach you. These are the attachments that went with it. You will see that there is a student consent form which ethical considerations require to be signed. I have also stated in my ethics draft submission that parents will countersign and be offered an explanation of the research if required. I realise this is an added burden I wonder if you could get the students to sign the form and then I can send a copy with a letter to the parents perhaps. You will also see that to make sure the students do not feel threatened by me in any way because of the power relationship I have suggested that you choose the students and keep the identity anonymous from me. I don't know how realistic this is but It went down well on my ethics submission form.

[REDACTED]

: attachments were student consent form, student ethics, ethics draft.

email from Tom to Luke at an early stage

Sent: 02 June 2009 16:32

To: [REDACTED]

Subject:

Hi [REDACTED]

I thought I would send you some ideas for you to think about following my approach to you this morning to help with my research. My thesis is about the leadership (or not) that heads provide to students. This is rather different from most of the work on headteacher leadership which focuses on heads leading adults not children. I am trying to get answers to the four research questions at the top of this attachment and using focus groups and recording it and then transcribing it and picking out common themes seems the best way. I plan to do this with 6 groups of varying composition (yr 11, Council, yr 7, Tracs students and then 6 that know me and 6 that don't.) A total of 42 students in all. I had planned to use student facilitators but that is fraught with difficulty although if it works with you leading then maybe we could try it with students having guidance from you. I have asked you as there needs to be someone who the students trust (confidentiality guaranteed) and who they will feel comfortable with about telling the truth. It is important for me to have someone leading who I can trust and who will understand the project and its purpose. Following analysis of these interviews there will be follow up in depth interviews with a sample of students carried out possibly with another researcher.

I hope you feel able to help with this and if so I suggest a meeting with me and a look at the sophisticated and good recorder I have and a chat about the thesis in general and then a rough and dirty pilot with a random group of students to work out which questions work and how they can be phrased to get the best answers to the research question.

I would also value your thought and comments about the process and wonder if you as researcher could keep some notes about your thoughts during the interviews to be a triangulation of some of the comments that are made. I would also value any questions you could add to those that I have included that may better get some information about what our students think of my student leadership or the hows and whys of how I lead students and what they think of it, how to improve it and does it in fact matter.

Appendix 3: Yr. 8 questions

Assembly Questions

1. What do you remember about assembly?
2. What does Mr █ do in this school?
3. How well do you know him? Does he know you? Do you see him every day?
4. When did you last talk to him or him to you?
5. What should a head do?
6. How important is he in your life?
7. How important and in what ways in the school?
8. What would happen if a school didn't have a head?
9. What influence will the head have for you in the time you are here?
10. What would your ideal head?

- | | |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) | What do you remember about assembly |
| (2) | What does _____ do in this school? |
| (3) | How well do you know him? Does he know you? Do you see him everyday? |
| (4) | When did you last talk to him <u>or</u> him to you? |
| (5) | What should a head do? |
| (6) | How important is he in your life? |
| (7) | How important + in what ways in the school? |
| (8) | What would happen if a school didn't have a head? |
| (9) | What influence will the head have for you in the time you are here? |
| (10) | What would be your ideal head? |

Appendix 4: Luke's Comments on the Pilot Discussion Prompts

" In terms of what I used to form the interviews, Tom had gone through what points he was trying to investigate and this gave me ideas for these 'topics'. Using these as a guide, I formed some questions to use as a framework for the interviews which Tom checked over. I used these in each interview, although may have worded them differently depending on which cohort I was dealing with e.g. Year 7 or Year 11. Quite often the students spoke about one point and then went off in another direction, where possible I tried to ensure they stayed on point, but often it was interesting to allow them to raise and discuss points they felt were relevant for them in relation to the topic."

Appendix 5:

Second round of Student Interviews

Rough pointers for discussion

Introduction - explain why chosen -
Chance to explore ideas
further etc.

~~Need for someone at top~~

& Someone has to make the decisions

Someone at the top & makes it harder
for them to be closer and friendly -
is that what they want?

If Mr [REDACTED] + Mr [REDACTED] switched
roles would they get that level of
intimacy / keep it with [REDACTED]? Position
opposed to personality?

Expand of relationship with Head
(important to be known by him?)

Same as teachers - why is it different?

How can [REDACTED] provide opportunities to
praise students & especially 'silent majority'
& what feelings + why & come from
being praised by APG & what benefits occur?

Benefits of good relationship / student leadership with Head

(2)

Perceptions Of [REDACTED] role - misunderstandings.

say!!
Just sits in his office
concent for own glory } How can this
be put across?
Explore
the
misunderstandings
they knew?

EVERYTHING IS FOR THEM! } Would it make
a difference if?

they knew?
e.g./ he stands up at the end of concert to get glory for himself!

As you see it - what is your perception
of leadership?

Good students think only the bad get
the attention - also acknowledged by the
bad who realise it is not fair...

what can be done?

Importance or feeling listened to....

R Why is this important?
How can it be strengthened?

G Personal nature or relationships

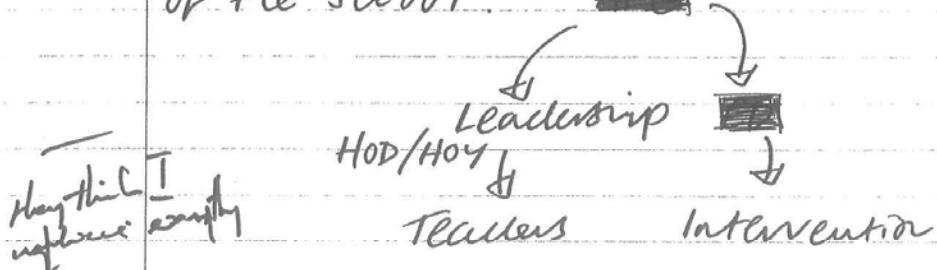
Again, personality or position -
Why are some more comfortable
with [REDACTED]?



- * familiar?
- * Appearance?
- * Attitude?
- * Teacher / position?

(3)

Do they understand leadership structure
of the school?



Where do they get the notion of [redacted]
making decisions?

One of the functions of Head is to be
independent → the final arbiter....



Why do some see [redacted] role as punishment
& sometimes negative?

Uniforms / phones / act. week ??

Dress and appearance & more important
with older students & developing into
independent learners?
Young adults?

✓ "Heads don't do much student leading
cos I don't see him"

CHURCHILL - People felt led even though
they never saw him!

Myths and legends about the head

(4)

[redacted] esp... No student leadership?
But thinks its important

[redacted] only here in the fore for things
out or school → website / paper
[redacted] / [redacted]
"outcome!"

No idea of [redacted] role → if he's not in
front of me - he's not doing anything
e.g. canteen at the end of term / concerns
& Why think student avoidance /
self promotion & good of college / students
is the answer.

Why would "connection" make a real
difference → and what connection?
Why would behaviour learning improve
if students had a better relationship
with staff and ultimately the head?

Being known is more important to older
students - again growing up? Wanting
to be acknowledged as an individual?

Why do some students want [redacted] to be
a 'fixer' and solve all problems - delegation
acceptable?

Why are some students 'scared' of [redacted]?

(5)

Why think that sometimes [redacted] cares more about results / governors than students?

LEADING OF STUDENTS?



When, where, how?

Shouting / friendship

balance

Why perception from some or no relationship and distance e.g. appearance - Why is the suit such a barrier?

Why do they think Heads wear a suit?
Leadership status & make an issue of it!!

Examples of student leadership?

Any since last interview?

Does student leadership have to include interaction with students?

What barriers are in the way to stop more interaction → time, appearance etc.

What is their idea of student leadership?

Recognise that student leadership and leadership of the school → the need for authority vs. inspiration? Can be different.

If [redacted] arrives late at the canteen - it's not student avoidance - he has been working for them or on duty → only missed 1 concert in 3 years!!!

(6)

Doesn't stand up at the end of concerts/productions/awards to take glory himself & is proud of student achievements and wants to do best by them. Can this perception be changed? If so, how?

Finally, just how important is being "Known" to them?

Appendix 5a: Agreed Themes Being Suggested from the Interviews

The need for someone at the top
Someone at the top makes it harder for them to be closer and friendly
Do they want someone at the top to be close and friendly
Position opposed to personality
Is it important to be known by the Principal?
Is the relationship the same as with the teachers? Why is it different?
How can the Principal provide opportunities to praise students?
What feelings and why come from being praised; what benefits occur from this?
The benefits of a good relationship with the head?
The misunderstandings of the Head's role, his leadership and what he does;
The idea that everything is for them
The concept of justice is very important
The good students think the bad get the attention
The bad recognise that they get the attention
The bad recognise that them getting attention is not fair
Being listened to is important? Why is this important? How can this be strengthened?

The personal nature of the relationship
Personality or position again? The factors that influence the relationship; familiarity, appearance, dress, attitude. Why do older students see the appearance as a more important factor?
The student understanding of the formal structure; Where does the student notion of the executive nature of the Principal's power come from?
The concept of the Principal as the final arbiter, the peace maker, the independent being, the ombudsman
Why do some see the role as the punisher? Why is this seen as negative?
Do those who think he doesn't do much still feel led eg XX
Some see the external role of the Head, PR, presentation, website, in the paper as more important. If I don't see him then he is not doing anything for me.
What is the connection? Why could this influence behaviour, learning?
Being known seems more important to older students
Many see the Principal as the fixer, the solution to all problems

Appendix 6: Question Prompts Sample, Conceptualisations

And head of lower school, yeah, so actually not having a head teacher at the top there, sort of having that overview of it all and managing all that - how do you think that would work? Do you think the school would just go into chaos?"

"So this question is... is important to have a headteacher?"

"So do you think it's more important for the teachers to have a headmaster than for you guys?"

"What do you think it would be like not to have a head teacher?"

"So you think you need to have someone to guide everyone together?"

"So what do you think it would be like?"

"Okay.... Why is it important for you to have a headteacher then.... Why do you think its important?"

"You do think that a school, even if it's not called a head teacher, needs a leader of some sort?" "what do you think affects you the most - one single thing he does?"

"So you've got someone in charge?"

"How would you feel not to have a headteacher then.... What do you think it would be like not to have a headteacher?"

"Is it that because you've got used to the structure and everything?"

"So you know what the rules are, and what the boundaries are and all that sort of thing?"

"So what sort of picture have you got in your head then of the headmaster in school - do you think of someone sat in an office or someone in a classroom?"

"So why is that? Is that because you see him spending more time with staff rather than students. Is that why you think he's more there for the staff?"

"What about you guys? Would you notice if there wasn't a head teacher?"

"If tomorrow Mr Blue was to walk out?"

"But do you think if you came back and had a whole term without a head?"

"But don't forget we not talking so much about Mr Blue going - but not having a head at all... so when Mr Blue goes out, Mr Orange or someone takes his place?"

"So do you think that people listen when the headteacher speaks?"

"So what - personally or what he thinks about school or?"

Appendix 7: Ethical Research Approval

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



School of Education and Lifelong Learning

Certificate of ethical research approval

STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS
You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, then have it signed by your supervisor and by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/guides.php> and view the School's statement in your handbooks.

READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER (the form will expand to contain the text you enter).
DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND

Your name: Anthony Peter Gray

Your student no: 009490529

Degree/Programme of Study: Ed D

Project Supervisor(s): Prof Debra Myhill, Prof Wendy Robinson

Your email address: tgray@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk

Tel: 01626 862235

Title of your project:

Does Being There Matter: An investigation of the nature and effects on school students of headteacher leadership.

Brief description of your research project:

This is a project on school leadership from the inside perspective of a serving headteacher. It aims to add to the body of knowledge of effective school leadership by investigating how the leadership of this headteacher is perceived by students in his own school. The research will seek to answer the questions of what students see and experience as student leadership, how they feel it affects them and

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: September 2007

their school life and the ways they feel that student leadership by the headteacher could change to make more of a difference to them.

Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved): 42 school children aged between 11 – 18. They are of mixed gender and a range of academic ability and social position. A male, non teaching member of staff aged 24.

Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs) a blank consent form can be downloaded from the SELL student access on-line documents:

The students involved in the research will be volunteers chosen by the male member of the College support staff (researcher on behalf of the headteacher/author). There will be no compulsion to participate in the research and it will be made clear that they can withdraw from the project at any stage. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve anonymity. The identity of the students will also be kept from the headteacher /author to avoid any fears the volunteers may have about the power relationship of the headteacher/author to them. The volunteers will be asked to sign a consent form (SELL consent form) and their parents will be asked to countersign the form. A letter explaining the research purpose, method of data collection and analysis will be sent to volunteers and their parents. Parents and students will be offered an opportunity to discuss any issue about the project with the researcher and the headteacher/author.

Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:

The methods of data collection will be through student focus groups and student interview. The researcher is a well respected and intuitive member of the College intervention team who is used to working with students of all abilities in a non threatening supportive manner. The focus group sessions will be carried out in a comfortable environment with the researcher prompting discussion with stimulus phrases designed to reassure students of the cooperative nature of the discussion which may provide data to help answer the research questions. The group size will mostly be 6 students, carefully chosen to ensure that they are comfortable with other members of the group. One group, the College Council, will be larger (12). The focus groups will be audio recorded with an unobtrusive microphone situated centrally. The audio data will be transcribed with student identity removed.

The transcriptions will be analysed thematically.

In depth interviews will follow the focus group sessions. Two students from each of the focus groups will be interviewed, to pursue at a deeper level, emerging themes from the focus groups. Students will be interviewed in pairs, rather than singly, to avoid any feeling of intimidation or power relationship with the researcher. Those chosen to participate in the interviews will be volunteers and no compulsion to participate will be exercised whatsoever. Parents will be informed and the researcher will provide every opportunity for the student or parent to discuss the interview process and purpose. The interview data will be audio recorded and transcribed, preserving anonymity. The data will be analysed anonymously.

Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g., secure storage of video's/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):

The audio data will be digitally stored in a password protected computer and the discs stored in a secure safe. The transcription data will be securely stored electronically.

Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: September 2007

The key ethical issue in this piece of research is the effect of the power relationship between the headteacher/ author and the volunteer students. It would be ethically unsound for the insider headteacher to conduct the focus group and in depth student interviews, as students could feel vulnerable and unprotected by the process, despite good intentions and best assurances to the student volunteers and their parents. The use of a proxy researcher, who is well known and respected by the volunteers and who is not associated directly with the power structure within the College, will avoid the ethical issue of the headteacher carrying out the research. To avoid student vulnerability, the identity of the students will remain anonymous to the headteacher/author as the choice of students and the contact with their parents will be carried out by the researcher, not the headteacher. The problem of transcribing the audio data and preserving anonymity can be solved by the headteacher/author remaining outside the process and working only on the anonymous transcribed data.

This form should now be printed out, signed by you below and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's Research Support Office for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given above and that I undertake in my dissertation / thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:.....A. P. Gray.....date: 17/6/09..

N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor

This project has been approved for the period: June 2009 until: June 2010

By (above mentioned supervisor's signature):DAMYL JUUN.....date: 22.06.09.....

N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occurs a further form is completed.

SELL unique approval reference:.....D.103.109.162.....

Signed:.....S. A. H. D. A.date: 24/06/09.....
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from
<http://www.education.ex.ac.uk/students/index.php> then click on On-line documents.

Chair of the School's Ethics Committee
last updated: September 2007

Appendix Y8: A Yr. 7 Student and Known Student, Consent with Parental Consent, Form.



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

[Redacted]
(Signature of participant)

[Redacted]
(Date)

[Redacted]
(Printed name of participant)

[Redacted]
(Date)

[Redacted]
(Signature of parent/guardian)

[Redacted]
(Printed name of parent/guardian)

*Students known focus group
B Heywood 17/6/09*

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher

Contact phone number of researcher – Ben Heywood 07954994426 / 01626 774091

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Ben Heywood 07954994426 / ben.heywood@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.



SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information which I give may be shared between any of the other researcher participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

[Redacted]
(Signature of participant)

[Redacted]
(Date)

[Redacted]
(Printed name of participant)

[Redacted]
(Date)

[Redacted]
(Signature of parent/guardian)

[Redacted]
(Printed name of parent/guardian)

*Year 7 Pows group
B Heywood 24/6/09*

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher

Contact phone number of researcher – Ben Heywood 07954994426 / 01626 774091

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Ben Heywood 07954994426 / ben.heywood@teignmouth.devon.sch.uk

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

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