Practices and characteristics of principals in low educational advantage, improving Victorian secondary schools; contextually aware leadership.

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Abstract

This study investigated the leadership of two secondary schools of low educational advantage on an improvement journey located in Victoria, Australia. This study provides further understanding of the ways school principals interact with specific contextual factors in order to support their school improvement journey. In both cases, the principals overcame their school's challenging circumstances, defined by low performance and low advantage, by employing research based initiatives to drive improvement. Informed by a multiple perspective case study methodology, including interviews with the principal and other school leaders, teachers, parents, students and members of the school council, evidence found principals with a strong moral purpose and change leadership enabled long term, albeit slow improvement. This improvement was enabled by the principal's navigation of a range of contextual factors that influenced, and were influenced by, the characteristics and practices of the school leader.

Along with a strong moral purpose, the school principals had a relentless drive for change that enabled them to overcome great adversity within their school contexts. Employing practices such as increased accountability for teachers around their teaching and learning, implementing collaborative practices across many levels of the school and instilling hope through a strong vision, enabled transformation of these schools into a more desirable destination for students, teachers and the wider community.

Statement of original authorship

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. Joint publications generated during PhD candidature and contributions of co-authors are indicated in the Preface. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given in the text. This thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit for a PhD in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Preface

This thesis was used to report on one of my cases in the following publications;

Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., Longmuir, F., & McCrohan, K. (2018). The Leadership Culture and Context Nexus: Lessons from the leadership of improving schools. *International Studies in Educational Administration, 46*(1), pp. 22-44.

Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., Longmuir, F., & McCrohan, K. (2018). Successful school leadership that is culturally sensitive but not context constrained, in Murakami, E., Gurr, D. and Notman, R. (Eds) (2019) Educational *Leadership, Culture, and Success in High-Need Schools* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing), pp. 25-44.

These publications were published following the writing of my first case study in 2017 and which is reported in Chapter 4. The papers actually draw on my case study, rather than me drawing on the papers for the thesis. For each publication the contribution of each author was 25% with most of my contribution located in reporting on my case study.

Acknowledgement

I acknowledge The University of Melbourne for the opportunity to complete a Bachelor, Masters and now a Doctor of Philosophy under their tutelage. It has been a great honour to have such an opportunity at such an esteemed institution.

Thank you to the participants of this study, particularly the two principals, who gave great insight into their professional lives and shared their personal stories too. Each school was a reminder of why education is such an integral part of our society and in particular, how education can change lives. Both principals were inspirational in their approach to work and life and they have influenced another generation of teachers to come. Education in Victoria is better for their involvement in the system. Thank you to both schools for welcoming me into their communities and allowing me to better understand the change that took place.

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To my family, thanking you for your support is difficult to write in words. To my parents and in-laws, thank you for your patience while I rescheduled my life to “when my PhD is over”. To my son, Matthew; I began this journey in the same year you were born. Little did I know that I would not complete this until you were seven years old. I have watched you grow into a beautiful young boy and I hope you have gained from this experience, knowing that life’s goals do take time and commitment. To my amazingly patient wife, Emma. You have supported me more than I could ever ask. Your love has been my guiding light. I will be forever grateful.

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List of Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AIP	Annual Implementation Plan
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
CDT	Curriculum Design Teams
CSF	Curriculum Standards Framework
DET	Department of Education and Training
DfES	The Department for Education and Skills
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EIM	Explicit Instruction Model
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ISSPP	International Successful School Principalship Project
LMS	Learning Management System
MDEGYA	Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians
MLM	Multi-level Modelling
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SAT	Standard Assessment Tasks
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SLT	Strategic Leadership Team
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education

CHAPTER 1:

1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the leadership of two principals in schools of low educational advantage on an improvement journey. Identifying the practices and characteristics used by these school leaders, this study also considers how their leadership for school improvement has been influenced by the school context. This chapter will outline the significance and background of this study, along with the research questions and a summary of the methodology used. An overview of the chapters is also provided.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Strong leadership in schools is important for school success. This ingredient has been well researched and validated for many years identifying the indirect influence school leadership has on student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2011; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). From this significant body of research, a core set of practices used by successful school leaders has been identified (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss. 2010; Robinson et al., 2009). Whilst these core practices provide valuable information for aspiring school leaders, the implementation of these does not guarantee success (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Some researchers are now calling for more insight into how leadership practices are influenced by the school context (Klar & Brewer, 2013; Leithwood, 2005) Building on the work completed by members of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), the purpose of this study is to provide greater insight into how low educational advantage context may influence the leadership practices and characteristics of the principal. It is hoped that this research will provide a better understanding of the intricacies of school leadership, particularly for those schools in challenging contexts.

This research could also be of interest to aspiring school leaders, policy makers and university lecturers delivering courses to our next generation of school leaders.

The two schools that are the subject of the case studies in this thesis have a history of failure and decline. One school is the amalgamation of three former failing schools, while the other has had years of declining enrolment numbers and was on the brink of closure. The two principals, employed as executive principals, were charged with establishing school communities that could instil hope for a better future for the students of these schools.

1.3 Background of study

This study forms part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP). The ISSPP are a team of researchers committed to creating a database of successful principals from each country to identify "the characteristics, processes and effects of successful school principalship in their own country" (Day, 2014, p.6). The original participants of the ISSPP were keen to use their expertise in the area of educational leadership and their motivation and belief that "the quality of principal leadership makes a great deal of difference to school improvement" (Day, 2014, p.6). Having moved through several phases of research, the ISSPP have what Caldwell (2014, p. xvii) has described as "the most comprehensive and coherent international comparative study of the Principalship ever undertaken". During Phase 1, the ISSPP investigated successful principals identified by a set of criteria. As they moved into Phase 2, ISSPP researchers revisited those principals researched in Phase 1 who remained in the same school five years later, to observe the sustainability levels of success. It was during Phase 2 that it became apparent to the researchers how changes in school context was influencing the emphasis placed on particular practices used by the school leaders.

This led to the development of Phase 3 research which was to investigate low performing schools with either high or low educational advantage (Day, 2014). This thesis has investigated principals leading low educational advantage schools that are on an improvement journey.

1.4 Research Objectives

The questions being addressed in this thesis are;

What are the practices and characteristics of school leaders in low advantage, improving schools?

How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in low advantage schools?

1.5 Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach to investigate the research questions. Using a multiple perspective, observational case study approach was considered most appropriate for this study as the researcher was immersed in the setting for a period of time to make sense of the real-life phenomenon of school leadership. Furthermore, a case study approach was an integral part of this research as it sought to explain contextual conditions by being part of the lived experience. The researcher made sense of the school leaders' everyday experiences through

interviews, observations and the reviewing of school documents that guided and recorded their practice.

To better understand the school's leadership, multiple perspectives were gathered from the principal, who was interviewed on three separate occasions, as well as individual interviews with numerous members of the school community (school leaders, teachers, parents and students). These members were identified as someone who could provide strong insight into the principals' characteristics and behaviours. Further information to support this research was gathered through observations and by reviewing school documents, e.g. newsletters, annual reports etc.

Using a complementary approach of Miles and Huberman's (1994) data reduction strategy, whereby the researcher selects, simplifies, abstracts and transforms the raw data taken from observations and interviews, the findings from this study were analysed using an inductive process to draw out the important patterns, themes and interrelationships (Patton, 2002). Using the themes discovered from each case study, meta-themes were conceived to provide further consideration in response to the research questions.

This approach was consistent with those conducted by the ISSPP many times before.

1.6 Summary of the Chapters

Chapter One provides an overview of the study and outlines the significance and background of this research. A summary of the methodology and brief description of each chapter is also provided.

Chapter Two reviews literature related to this study, including relevant theories around school leadership, effective schools, school improvement and context. A number of models and frameworks are summarised to provide a context for this study.

Chapter Three provides the detail of methodology used. It provides a rationale for the use of a qualitative approach, as well as outline the philosophical groundings of the study. This chapter describes the research design, inclusive of the selection criteria of the schools and the methods by which data was gathered. It provides detail around the ethics governing this study and the limitations and delimitations encountered.

Chapter Four presents the findings from the first case study school, Northern College. Information about the school profile and context is provided before delving into an exploration of the leadership practices and characteristics of the principal. Through an analysis of the data gathered from interviews, observations and document reviews, themes were identified and

presented. Following the school's amalgamation from three failing schools, this case study showed that Northern College was on a school improvement journey built from the foundation of a strong, shared vision and executed by the principal using research based practices to turn around the school's image and performance. This case centred around building the leadership capacity of its staff, particularly the leadership group. Evidence of a principal with a deep understanding of the contextual factors, a strong moral purpose, along with his relentless pursuit for excellence, led to strict accountability measures and performance expectations for staff.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the second case study school, East Meadows College. The format of this chapter follows that of Chapter Four with the themes identified from the data analysis presented in relation to the same sections. Whilst East Meadows College's educational disadvantage was not as severe as Northern College's, the need to re-establish the school's reputation and image was warranted by the steep decline in student numbers in the preceding years. The principal's appointment immediately brought change to fundamental aspects of the school, i.e. the school's curriculum and brand. In a similar fashion to Northern College, the principal at East Meadows understood the contextual factors and her personal characteristics supported strong collaboration efforts with local government, organisations and businesses to engineer opportunities for her school that would otherwise be financially unviable. Whilst the principal initially demonstrated autocratic leadership, over time, collaborative practices were evident in the school's practice and key to their improvement journey.

Chapter Six presents a cross-case comparison of the two case studies, from which five meta-themes emerge. This provides a basis for further exploration and consideration of the significance of these findings. Strong contextual awareness enabled both schools to develop improvement journeys reflective of their community's need and what constitutes an effective school. With excellent change leadership and management skills and centred around effective practices, both school leaders developed collaborative practices that resulted in a shared school vision and an enhancement in the teaching and learning of their community. This focus on the core business of education provided their communities with a great sense of hope for the future.

Using the relevant literature to address the research questions, Chapter Seven discusses what was found in Chapters Four, Five and Six. This chapter highlights the practices and characteristics of these two principals that influenced their school improvement journey and effectively navigated the broad and local contexts. Using these findings, a model of successful school leadership in two low-advantage schools was presented. This model illustrated how

school contexts and sustainable leadership practices interact to create short term and long term desirable outcomes for students and schools.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with adding to what we already know about leading schools by exploring their leadership and contextual variables. In particular, this study will investigate schools in challenging educational contexts that are currently underperforming, but are on an improvement journey. The following literature review will provide an overview of the literature, including relevant studies, models and frameworks to support this investigation. This chapter will be structured around four distinct themes;

- The characteristics of an effective school and what constitutes success in education. For the purpose of this study, the connection between educational effectiveness and school improvement theory will be made.
- A review of what educational leaders do to establish and maintain successful schools. This will include a review of some key studies that have informed this research.
- A review of the educational influence of school context, with a particular focus on challenging contexts.
- A review of what leaders do to turnaround an underperforming school, including the leadership styles that correlate with successful school leadership.

2.2 School Effectiveness and Success

The purpose of school effectiveness research was born out of the reaction to the Coleman report (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield & York, 1966). The Coleman report, aptly named after the director of this US government study, reviewed the quality of education for all Americans, highlighting the differences in education of minority groups. It found that there were large "inequalities in the education of children of different races, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic classes" (Cain & Watts, 1970, p.228). Most significantly was the finding that "the social class composition of a student's school had the largest effect on academic achievement" (Diaz 2012, p. 401). Beare (2007, p. 32) emphasised the reality of this finding by stating, "whatever inputs the school receives, the same people will come out on top, and you can grade the attainment of students on the single factor of their SES (socioeconomic status)." Ultimately, the Coleman report concluded that schools did not matter (Coleman et al., 1966; Reynolds, Teddlie, Creemers, Scheerens & Townsend, 2000).

As a result of this study, school effectiveness research took up the challenge to identify that schools did matter and sought to find ways to enhance the quality of schooling, particularly for

the most vulnerable (Reynolds et al., 2000; Scheerens, 2015). Strong interest was shown by researchers in conducting further studies on underperforming schools, who wished to disprove that a student's background was not the determining factor of whether or not a student could achieve academic success at school (Weber, 1971). However, the focus on a student's background was at the expense that they "did not include adequate measures of school social psychological climate and other classroom/ school process variables" (Reynolds et al., 2000, p. 6) and therefore underestimated the magnitude of the school effects. Furthermore, there was a heavy reliance on the use of standardised test scores as measures of effectiveness. (Frederick, 1987; Hopkins, 2001). As this area of research matured, so too did the sophistication of school effectiveness measurements.

2.3 Measure of School Effectiveness

As Levin (2012) identifies, since the middle of the twentieth century, an effective school was one that produced "persons with more education (and) had more skills that were valued in labour markets", as this (the education) "contributed to (the person's) productivity and income". At the time, this was a broadly held belief to measure an effective school (Blair, 2002; Masters, 2012; Reynolds, Sammons, Fraine, Van Damme, Townsend, Teddlie & Stringfield, 2014). This measure of school effectiveness has not diminished in recent times with the implementation of national assessments, such as National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in Australia, Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) in Britain and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in the USA. As a result of such testing, "Schools are able to boast their 'effectiveness' by their position in national league tables" (Blair, 2002, p. 180). Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis and Ecob (1989, p. 756) would argue this is too simplistic a view of school effectiveness, stating that, "Basic skills are important, but other areas, including aspects of non-cognitive development such as attitudes, behaviour and attendance, are also a focus of attention. We feared that studies which used only one or two measures of outcomes may give an unbalanced and simplistic view of class and school effects".

Despite this simplistic view of school effectiveness being accepted by mainstream society, research has benefitted from great advances in methodologies used to develop our understanding of what constitutes an effective school. In particular, Multi-level Modelling (MLM), which allows researchers to examine "multiple variations, differential effects, and cross-level interactions" (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 202). Most significantly, the development of this methodology acknowledged the value added by a teacher and it linked the variables with the student output to their input variables rather than link directly to school level variables

(Reynolds et al., 2000). Information from these studies began to demonstrate the influence schooling had on achievement and identify certain characteristics of teachers that supported student achievement. This advancement, along with the inclusion of attitudinal and behavioural indicators to measure school effectiveness is supported by Harris, Chapman, Muijs, Campbell, Creemers, Earl, Kyriakides, Munoz, Stoll, Stringfield, van Velzen, Weinstein and Reynolds (2013, p. 4) who credit this research, for "reliable evidence about the characteristics of effective schools, effective teaching practices and effective improvement at the school and system level". This view is extended by Creemers, Kyriakides and Sammons (2010, p. 3) who argue that the term 'educational effectiveness' should be used as this considers both school level and teacher level effectiveness. Over a short time, it has been made clear that "neither level can be studied without considering the other" (Creemers et al, 2010, p. 4).

By virtue of MLM methodology Reynolds et al. (2014, p.204) concluded that, "teacher and school effects could account for a substantial proportion of the variance in student outcomes". This conclusion is in stark contrast to the Coleman report's (Coleman et al., 1966) finding of fifty years earlier. As the study of school effectiveness has become more sophisticated, so too has the confidence in which researchers can claim that the system and school level structures and teaching practices all support an effective education (Jarl, Anderson & Blossing, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2009).

Other advances in methodology has included the use of meta-analysis. This approach has enabled researchers to make generalisations from very large numbers of studies. Hattie's (2008) meta-analysis compilation is probably the most recognisable form of this methodology in education. Hattie's (2008) conclusions define the practices that make the biggest differences in student learning in schools. These practices are based on over 50,000 studies and data from millions of students. There are a number of other meta-analyses in education that provide a sound knowledge base for systems, schools and educators (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu, Brown, Ahtaridou, & Kington, 2009; Robinson et al., 2009).

This advance in methodology has provided rich information for school systems in recent times as they aim to replicate the characteristics of an effective school.

2.4 Characteristics of Educational Effectiveness

Since the study of school effectiveness began, researchers have sought to find the key to an effective school. In doing so, there have been numerous lists of what constitutes an effective school. For the sake of easy comparison of these features, please refer to Table 2.1.

In 1974, the Office of Education and Review in New York compared two schools in the New York district, one considered effective in their reading instruction, the other not. The findings in Table 2.1 were drawn from Edmonds (1979) and provide a good comparison for other similar studies completed in later years.

Throughout the 1980's, there was much reference to what became the Edmonds five factor model of school effectiveness. These five indicators of school effectiveness also found in Table 2.1 have heavily influenced ongoing research in the area of school effectiveness (De Vos, 1995; Scheerens & Stoel, 1988, Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007).

Table 2.1: Characteristics of an effective school

Office of Education and Review, Klepak, (1974); Edmonds, (1979); Dobbie and Fryer (2013)	Edmonds five factor model of school effectiveness - Edmonds (1979); Dobbie and Fryer (2013)	Levine and Lezotte (1990)	Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis and Ecob (1989)
• Principal skill. • Expectations placed on students. • Classroom instruction.	• Strong educational leadership. • High expectations of student achievement. • Academic goal consensus. • Safe and orderly climate. • Frequent evaluation.	• Productive school climate and culture. • Focus on student acquisition of central learning skills. • Appropriate monitoring of student progress. • Practice-oriented staff development at the school site. • Outstanding leadership. • Salient parent involvement. • Effective instructional arrangements and implementation. • High operationalized expectations and requirements for students.	• Purposeful leadership. • Involvement of the deputy head. • The involvement of teachers. • Consistency amongst teachers. • Structured sessions. • Intellectually challenging teaching. • Work centred environment. • Limited focus within sessions. • Maximum communication between teachers and pupils. • Record keeping. • Parental involvement. • Positive climate.

Levine and Lezotte (1990) created their own variables that influence school effectiveness, which built on the work of earlier studies in this area, and also along with Mortimore et al. (1989) found parental involvement and school climate as additional variables that effective schools needed to navigate. In creating their own characteristics of an effective school, Mortimore et

al. (1989) included a significant point of difference by measuring cognitive and non-cognitive development, such as attitudes and behaviours.

Their study revealed twelve key factors of effectiveness, many of which affirmed previous findings. The recent studies highlighted the importance of a positive school climate and the necessity of parent engagement with the school.

There is some congruency in Table 2.1 between each of the descriptions of what constitutes an effective school, but there are also subtle differences. Mortimore et al. (1989) were a lot more prescriptive and provided much detail in the description of each of their features. In doing so, it provided many links to be made to features listed in other studies.

There is great practical value in studies that develop features of what makes an effective school. However, Mortimore et al. (1989) are clear that these features do not operate in a vacuum. They depend upon a specific set of "behaviours and strategies employed by the headteacher and staff (and) the school and the classroom are in many ways interlocked: what the teacher can or cannot do depends, to a certain extent, on what is happening in the school as a whole" (Mortimore et al., 1989, p. 768).

The role of the headteacher is an integral part of this study, particularly the characteristics and behaviours they employ to be successful. It is at this point we explore the notion of success to clarify the focus of this study on leadership of successful schools rather than school effectiveness.

2.5 School Success

As discussed earlier, school effectiveness has moved beyond the measurement of single test scores. The move to a more holistic view of educational effectiveness aligns more closely with what the ISSPP defines as success. Day (2014, p.7) on behalf of the ISSPP, insists a leader of a successful school addresses the "broader moral, social and ethical issues in educating pupils". This view of success looks beyond just academic achievement and encompasses a more holistic approach, including areas such as creativity, innovation and the overall school climate (People for Education, 2013). Day and Sammons (2014) support more holistic determinants of school success and include the instilment of strong values and encouragement for the love of lifelong learning as further measures to explore.

How an education system determines what constitutes success can be drawn from their value statements. In Australia, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MDEGYA) clearly outlines the values and aims of education (Ministerial Council on Education,

Early Childhood Develeopment and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), 2008). The MDEGYA has been agreed on by all states and territories of Australia as the purpose and role of schooling to ensure a high quality education for all students regardless of their background (Carter, 2018). The preamble in this document states;

> "As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society; a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future".
>
> (MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 4)

MCEECDYA (2008) outlines the goals for Australian school students and provides a broad definition of how success is achieved. These include;

> *Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence*
>
> *Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens*

Elaborations of Goal 2 provide further insight into what success looks like for schools in Australia. Schools are successful if their students;

- develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning
- have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas
- are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines
- are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning
- are able to plan activities independently, collaborate, work in teams and communicate ideas
- are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are
- are on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills to make informed learning and employment decisions throughout their lives
- are motivated to reach their full potential.

(MCEECDYA, 2008, p. 8)

For school leaders, these elaborations offer indicators and measures of success beyond academic achievement and can be used to identify actions for school improvement.

Using case studies of Australian schools, this thesis will use the success achieved by leaders undertaking a school improvement journey to consider how their leadership has been influenced by their school context. The following section will identify the opportunity for these school leaders to employ evidence-based practices drawn from research that characterise effective schools to achieve greater levels of success for their school.

2.6 Educational Effectiveness and School Improvement

As school effectiveness research continued to develop, it aimed at creating effective schools rather than describing them (Reynolds et al., 2000). As such, it was clear this area of research had much to offer school reform and improvement. Systems and schools need to look no further than the following clear outline of Harris et al. (2013, p. 4);

- Reliable evidence about the characteristics of effective schools, effective teaching practices and effective improvement at the school and system level; and
- Robust evidence about how outcomes at school and teacher levels improve, and, more recently, emerging evidence about how system level characteristics may also be levered to generate positive change.

Whilst this is a strong argument for the adoption of school effectiveness research, improvement strategies based on evidence is not used broadly in schools and across education systems (Harris et al., 2013). This is particularly the case when considering the school context and the strategies and interventions that will work best. To change this, Harris et al. (2013) argue that there needs to be more multilevel research involving the classroom, school and system, and the research must be relevant to the goals of education and be of the highest quality.

The issue of context specific research and the transferability of proven effective interventions in one context to another is an important one for researchers. This is reflected on by Harris, Adams, Jones and Muniandy (2015, p.1) who state that "the school effectiveness and school improvement research base has consistently underlined the importance of context in explaining relative school and system performance".

The use of international standardised assessments, such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has clouded the relevance of context as education systems look for what others do to be described as "high performing". Education systems will then investigate what makes a system

high performing and look to replicate those practices, strategies or processes in their own system. The difficulty is that schools are differentially effective (Hopkins, Harris & Jackson, 1997). Hopkins et al. (1997) argue that for schools to improve they must first consider the internal conditions of the school and focus on how the school can improve itself using the resources they already have. According to Hopkins et al. (1997, p. 402), the internal conditions of a school include;

- A transformational leadership approach
- A commitment to staff development
- Practical efforts to involve staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions
- Effective coordination strategies
- Proper attention to the potential benefits of enquiry and reflection
- A commitment to collaborative planning activity.

Although research on differential school improvement strategies is weak, it is reasonable to assume that the same strategy will not have the same result in contextually different schools, particularly across a whole system (Hopkins et al. 1997). To create effective systems, Sun, Creemers and de Jong (2007, p. 95) argue that an education system can be more effective by society placing greater value "on the educational system and the importance of the teaching profession". Regardless of the school context, the presence of strong leadership is a necessity in schools. With this in mind, we now consider the role of strong leadership to achieve and maintain successful schools.

2.7 What Educational Leaders Do to Establish and Maintain Successful Schools

Strong leadership in effective schools "is widely considered the vital ingredient" (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014, p.6). The research considers leadership as having a strong indirect influence on student learning (Hallinger, Bickman & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Day, 2007a; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). An effective leader of a successful school can be identified by the presence of a set of core practices. These practices have been synthesised into a number of key areas. The core practices evident with successful school leaders are;

- set clear directions,
- develop people,
- redesign the organisation, and
- manage the teaching program

(Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al, 2010; Robinson et al., 2009).

These core practices have been researched thoroughly, from which the following elaborations provide further insight to;

2.7.1 Set Clear Directions

Whether referring to the notion of setting clear directions, goal setting, establishing a vision, these are all different ways to describe a practice that is used to align members of an organisation to reach a common goal. Aligning members will lead to a collective motivation within the group. It is recognised that motivated people want to achieve goals that are personally significant to them (Bandura, 1986). Therefore, it makes sense to share a vision that will allow its members to adopt and commit to, and develop a collective responsibility for its success. Beyond the field of education, Kotter (1996, p. 85) describes the importance of this action as developing a "shared sense of a desirable future can help motivate and coordinate the kinds of actions that create transformations".

2.7.2 Develop People

Developing people in a school is all about building teachers' capacity to complete a task and to achieve the school's shared vision. Why is this important for leaders to do? An international study conducted by Barber and Mourshed (2007, p.13) on behalf of McKinsey and Company, found that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers". Caldwell and Harris (2008), based the title of one of the chapters of their book, 'Why not the best schools?', from this finding. This chapter delves into the importance of intellectual capital within a school and of its staff, noting that what the students learn at school primarily depends upon the skill and knowledge of its entire staff. Hattie's (2008) meta-analysis would support this finding; a strong influence within the school of students' performance was the quality of the teacher (what they do in the classroom, not what qualifications they have) and the teacher-student relationships. High performing education systems around the world include practices such as appointing high quality staff according to the needs of the school, a mentoring and induction program in place for new staff, a focus of continual professional development, a collaborative approach to teaching within and across schools and the use of data and research to identify the needs of students (Caldwell & Harris, 2008; West, Ainscow & Stanford, 2005).

2.7.3 Redesign the Organisation

Although setting clear directions and developing people are already stated as core practices of high performing leaders, these are ineffective if people believe the circumstances they find themselves do not support achieving these goals (Leithwood et al. 2010). Therefore, it is important leaders concurrently look at creating working conditions that complement the shared vision and staff capacity building. Such things as developing collaborative cultures,

including structures to support this and building the social capital of the school through relationship building with families and the community are essential in redesigning the organisation in an effort for it to be more effective (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006). Developing collaborative cultures requires a leader to be implicit and explicit in what are the desirable norms and behaviours expected of staff (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2005). The benefits of inter-school collaboration are identified by Connolly and James (2006, p. 80) as a way to "share effective teaching practices to improve pupil achievement"; with the fringe benefit being that it "may also result in the acquisition of expertise". The importance of social capital is not new, as Coleman (1988) found that students from schools with high levels of social capital achieved lower dropout rates and higher outcomes than students from other schools.

2.7.4 Manage the Teaching Program

Central to all schools is the teaching and learning program offered. It is essential that school leaders are "attending directly to teaching and learning" (Leithwood et al., 2010, p.155). Researchers since the 1970's have referred to the title, 'Instructional Leadership' (Hallinger, 2003; Seashore Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010; Snyder, 1983) and identified the importance of school leaders influencing this aspect of a school's program. Hattie (2008) highlights that practices that have a substantial change in effecting student learning are the use of various instructional strategies and highlighting learning strategies and skill development in the learning areas. For leadership to have an impact in this area, such a focus is required from school leaders. This may come from recruiting staff that match the need of the school, monitoring student performance and the strategies teachers put in place to improve such learning, allowing for non-interrupted teaching time, monitoring and evaluating instruction and providing adequate resourcing.

These core practices have been built on by Day, Sammons, Harris, Leithwood, Hopkins, Gu and Brown (2010) who leveraged the work of Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and provided a sequel to the work of Leithwood et al. (2008) and their *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School*

Leadership. In summarising their findings of a three year study, the research team found a successful headteacher looks beyond academic success and considers more holistic achievements of the school including such things as, social and personal outcomes, engagement and wellbeing and the school's contribution to the community (Day et al., 2010). Leadership that considers such a holistic view of education not only aligns with the ISSPP definition of success discussed earlier but also affirms the essential elements of effectiveness.

2.8 Leadership Framework and Models

There have been a number of frameworks and models that have expanded on these essential elements for effective educational leadership. This section will explore Leithwood, Sun and Pollock's (2017) *Four paths framework* and Hitt and Tucker's (2016) *Unified model of effective leader practices* to develop greater insights into the necessary attributes of effective school leadership. The two examples have been chosen because they add further weight to the essential nature of the core practices outlined previously and they are studies of significant influence on educational leadership research.

2.8.1 The Four Paths Framework

Leithwood et al. (2017) expanded on the core practices outlined in the previous section by considering how do school leaders contribute to improved student achievement in their schools. They summarised their findings in a framework. The Four Paths framework, illustrates the ways in which school leaders' influence student learning. These paths are identified as rational, emotional, organisational and family.

Along each of these paths are moderators and mediators that can have a significant effect on student learning. These variables were selected because there is a significant amount of evidence to suggest that they have a "relatively direct and significant effect on students and that they can be influenced by those in a position of leadership" (Leithwood, Sun & Schumacker, 2020, p. 572). As the status of these variables improve through the influence of school leadership, so too does "the quality of students' school and classroom experiences, resulting in greater learning for students" (Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 572).

Each of the paths contain a set of variables as outlined below;

The variables within the Rational Path sit within the core business of education and deal with the knowledge and skills of school staff about curriculum, teaching and learning. These include;

- Classroom Instruction.
- Academic Press.

- Disciplinary Climate.
- Teacher's use of instructional time.

The Emotions Path recognises the individual or collective feelings, dispositions or affective states of staff that shape the nature of their work. These include;

- Collective teacher efficacy
- Teacher trust in others
- Teacher commitment

The organisational path identifies variables that include the features of the organisational structures influencing relationships and interactions of staff. These include;

- Safe and orderly environment
- Collaborative structures and culture
- Organisation of planning and instructional time

The variables on the Family Path include the features of the home that can be altered and which demonstrate significant contributions to student success at school. These include;

- Parents expectations for children's success at school and beyond
- Forms of communication between parents and children
- Parents' social and intellectual capital about schooling

Leithwood et al. (2020, p. 590) recognised that this study used a broad set of practices to research and acknowledged the value that "more in-depth qualitative research would be useful in adding greater specificity to those practices for each of the most promising mediating variables". However, the research does provide school leaders with direction with which they should focus their efforts to improve student achievement in their school.

The Four Paths framework is the basis of the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF), which Hitt and Tucker (2016) describe as being the most valuable evidence based literature available of effective school leaders practices. Hitt and Tucker (2016) used this framework, along with others, to develop the Unified Model of Effective Leader Practices, described below.

2.8.2 Unified Model of Effective Leader Practices

Hitt and Tucker (2016) drew from existing research on leadership practices that influence student achievement to create their own unified model. This model assumes that "the efforts of leaders and teachers are intertwined in the pursuit of increased student achievement" (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 561). The study drew on research conducted between 2000 and 2014 and honed in on three particular frameworks;

The Essential Supports Framework, which was created as a result of analysing a longitudinal survey and student achievement data in Chicago Public Schools.

The Ontario Leadership Framework created by Leithwood (2012) from a review of literature that focuses on practices that enhance student achievement.

The Learning Centred Leadership Framework, developed by Murphy, Elliot, Goldring and Porter (2006) as part of a larger project to develop an innovative tool for school leaders to assess members of staff. It was created from a review of studies that looked at the influence of leadership on student achievement.

Despite these frameworks all being drawn from empirical research, differences existed and Hitt and Tucker (2016, p.543-544) went about creating a unified framework to organise the essential practices a leader should direct their effort towards to maximise student achievement. These practices, known as dimensions, are organised into 5 domains. These domains are;

- Establishing and conveying the vision
- Facilitating a high-quality learning experience for students
- Building professional capacity
- Creating a supportive organisation for learning
- Connecting with external partners

The strength of this unified framework is that;

- It draws from the leading research around leadership practice
- It recognises the effect school leaders have on members of staff and on the school environment
- It recognises the indirect effect school leaders have on students
- Its primary focus is to enhance teaching to improve student achievement

The unified framework assumes the school leader draws on practices reflective of an instructional and transformational leader; both leadership styles will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. This framework recognises the requirement of school leaders to have expertise across multiple aspects of education, i.e. teaching and learning and organisational management.

The review of research into educational leaders' practices and behaviours suggest there are a core suite of these that will enhance the performance of a school in any context. With this knowledge in mind, this thesis will now connect with the larger longitudinal study of the ISSPP, where this study resides. The ISSPP have long sought to identify the characters and practices of

successful school leaders. This thesis seeks to contribute to this extensive body of knowledge by considering the influence of contextual factors.

2.9 International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP)

The ISSPP began in 2001 with representatives from eight countries; Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Norway, Sweden and USA. The team of researchers agreed to create a database of successful principals from each country to identify "the characteristics, processes and effects of successful school principalship in their own country" (Day, 2014, p.6). The group of countries has since risen in excess of 20 and the researchers involved in this project have generated up to 200 publications of work, including four project books and seven special issues of international journals. The original participants of the ISSPP were keen to use their expertise in the area of educational leadership and their motivation and belief that "the quality of principal leadership makes a great deal of difference to school improvement" (Day, 2014). According to Gurr (2014), the aim of the ISSPP was to provide a better understanding of the contribution of principals to school success from countries beyond the USA and UK, which had dominated research up until the time the ISSPP team was formed and to gain perspectives on that success from people other than the principal.

Over the 18 years of the ISSPP's existence, the project has entered three distinct research strands.

2.9.1 Research Strand 1

The first research strand of the ISSPP investigated successful principals identified by a set of criteria that included;

- the reputation of the school
- the acknowledged success of the principals by their peers
- the evidence of improved student outcomes over time

(Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005, p. 541).

The findings from the initial phase of this project supported prior research that suggested a successful leader demonstrates core leadership practices. Within the Australian context, the findings were;

- The principal contributed significantly to the school's education program, particularly in the area of capacity building and teaching and learning.
- There was a common and consistent set of personal traits and behaviours exhibited by the principal. This included such attributes as being passionate and inspirational; seeing

> barriers as challenges, rather than impediments, and seeking solutions through creativity and lateral thinking
>
> (Gurr et al., 2005)

Including, and beyond the Australian case studies, Leithwood (2005) summarised all 63 case studies in the initial phase. He provided context specific examples but also highlighted

commonalities across contexts with regard to the practices used by successful principals, the internal and external factors that support successful principalship, the vast number of variables that link principal's practices to student learning, and the conditions that enhance or diminish a principal's effect. Evidence from this first research phase confirmed the principals engaged in the core practices of school leaders of setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the teaching and learning but it also highlighted that these core practices are insufficient for school success. Principals went beyond these core practices and demonstrated;

- a focus upon both social and academic goals.
- changing structures and cultures in order to open schools to their local communities.
- understanding and working with the tensions and dilemmas inherent in personal, social and policy contexts.
- the ability to respond to these but not be dependent upon them.

(Day & Leithwood, 2007, p. 186)

As well as providing this rich data, each set of case studies from Australia produced their own leadership model, highlighting the value of the information being gathered. During Leithwood's summary of the initial cases from ISSPP (Day & Leithwood, 2007), he noted the significance and limitations of the scale of the qualitative research being undertaken by this project; however, he also identified the incredible opportunities for the research team to develop conceptual frameworks from the vast quantity and richness of work being collected, which would support future research into educational leadership. The successful school leadership model's produced by Drysdale and Gurr (2011) and Mulford and Johns (2004) are examples of the possibilities for all involved in the ISSPP moving forward. Drysdale and Gurr's (2011) model went through a

number of adaptations over the years (Gurr & Drysdale, 2007; Gurr, Drysdale, Di Natale, Ford, Hardy & Swann, 2003; Gurr et al., 2005) as further evidence was considered and applied.

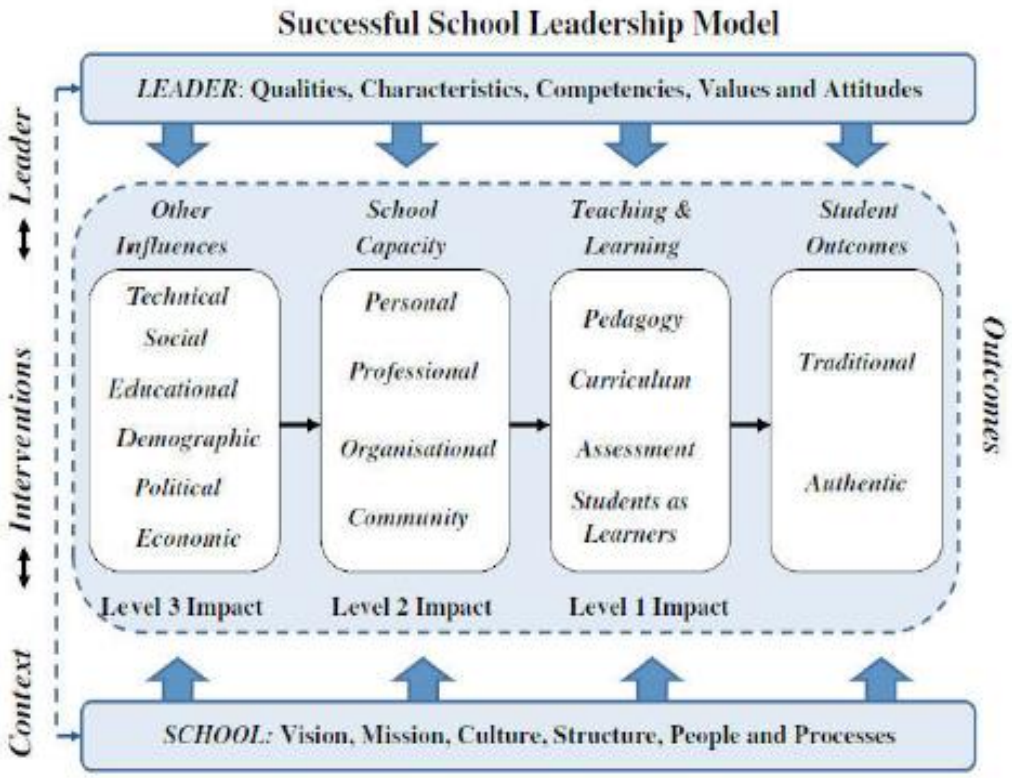


Figure 2.1: Drysdale & Gurr Successful School Leadership Model (2011). Permission granted to use model.

Figure 2.1 illustrates how a school leader's characteristics and attributes influence the different levels of impact on building the capacity of all the stakeholders in a school, i.e. the students, staff, parents, community, government. Leaders may work across a number of levels simultaneously or target a specific level, to execute interventions that are aimed at improving student academic, social, emotional and spiritual outcomes. Despite having an indirect impact on student outcomes, most school leaders are found to spend the majority of their time targeting Level 2, school capacity, through strategic professional development for staff, community education and networking or restructuring of the organisation for more efficient practice. Principals also work within Level 1, teaching and learning, which provides the most direct influence on student outcomes, and Level 3, recognised as other influences, through the work they engage in with professional bodies and to help shape policy development.

2.9.2 Research Strand 2

During strand 2 of the ISSPP, researchers revisited the principals from the first phase who remained in the same school five years later, to observe the sustainability levels of success. In

summarising the results from case studies from seven countries, Moos and Johansson (2009) used the four core leadership practices of setting direction, understanding and developing people, designing and managing communities, managing the teaching and learning program, and added the additional practice of leading environments. Leading environments acknowledges the work principals engage in with people and organisations external to the school (Moos & Johansson, 2009).

The cases that were revisited needed to consider how the internal and external contexts had changed. This highlighted an increase in accountability for schools, particularly in the

Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, where there was a growing comparison of local students using international standardised tests such as PISA, as well as greater emphasis on the outcomes of students. Sweden had also introduced school inspections to support improvement (Hoog, Olofsson & Johannson, 2009). This, along with increased expectations to work closely with parents, balancing the academic and social emphasis of the school program and developing a distributed model of leadership amongst staff, meant the principals' internal and external contexts had changed since the first case study of the schools had taken place.

Overall, the types of practices of the principals had not changed but the emphasis placed on particular practices had. With the external context changing in the Scandinavian countries, a greater emphasis on accountability and comparisons between countries using international standardised tests, these principals were observed to be demonstrating stronger direction setting practices (Moos & Johansson, 2009). Across all the studies, principals were placing greater emphasis on teacher teams to help build capacity of staff. Based on the focus and priority of the school, these teacher teams were given a range of autonomy. These ranged from autonomous in nature (Denmark), mostly autonomous (Australia) to little or no autonomy (England, USA, Norway). This direct approach to building the capacity of staff is quite evident in Denmark where Moos and Kofod (2009, p.716) observed that principals are "drawing lines between their (teacher's) work and the responsibilities of other stakeholders. At the same time principals lead through social technologies like contracts and self-steering teacher-teams and most importantly through setting the scene for discussions and decisions and making sense of the external and internal life of school for and with teachers''. Such an approach by Danish principals was necessary given the change in external context for the schools in that country.

As well as identifying the practices these school leaders had enacted to sustain their school's level of success, Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson and Merchant (2014) identified the key characteristics of the school leaders. These included such traits as;

- Driven by a philosophy of social justice
- Great care
- Highly ethical and morally responsible
- Demonstrated great resilience and persistence
- Courage

Garza et al. (2014, p. 808) also provided a number of considerations based on the findings from their case studies to support sustaining high levels of success in, and across schools;

- Principals need a prolonged period of engagement to effect positive change.
- The process of selection and appointment of principals must include strategies to screen for candidates that demonstrate strong dispositions for social justice
- Principals who are successful strategically focus on building teacher leadership capacity
- Successful schools can serve as training "labs" for the next generation of principals
- Formal and structured leadership succession transition plan is required for success to be sustained

2.9.3 Research Strand 3

The emphasis on context variables that were identified during research strand 2 of the ISSPP heightened awareness of the influence context has on how these practices are enacted (Leithwood, 2005). Prior to these case studies taking place, Leithwood (2005, p.623) was surprised in the lack of research exploring how "variations in context are related to variations in leadership practices", as this would throw light on the "factors stimulating successful school leadership practices". Klar and Brewer (2013, p.770) agree with Leithwood's observation, stating that "despite widespread agreement among scholars that school leadership is influenced by context, relatively little research has focused on this critical aspect of leadership practice".

The third strand of the ISSPP concentrated on developing a greater understanding of leadership in different contexts and what role that plays on school performance. During this phase schools that, according to the student composition, should be achieving better results are identified. These schools, performing below expectations, may be schools that one would expect to be performing poorly because of the contextual variables, such as a low educational advantage. This is the focus of this thesis and will be detailed in the case studies and discussion chapter.

However, this research strand also investigates schools that are less obvious underperformers, those that go unnoticed because of the high educational advantage the school enjoys. Longmuir (2017) conducted a parallel study to this one in which the author explored leadership of improving schools in high educational advantage settings. Longmuir (2017, p. ii) found that the principals in these schools "adjusted their leadership characteristics and practices in ways that were contextually sensitive and suited to the stage of improvement at their own schools". In both cases the schools adopted "next practices", new and innovative practices to transform their schools in response to broad contextual factors faced by the wider educational community.

Hallinger's (2016) paper framed the different types of school contexts a principal must navigate, in order to improve their school. These variables have been identified in the following way;

Institutional context - refers to the whole education system within which each school operates. There will be initiatives and mandates which each principal will need to apply to their school's setting.

Community context - identifies the differences in socioeconomic status and location (urban versus rural) of schools and how this influences the enactment of leadership style. The challenging school context, which has been addressed earlier in this literature review, also encompasses Hallinger's community context domain.

Socio-cultural context - Hallinger (2016, p.11) identified that "educational leadership is value-driven and that leaders achieve results through people. Different socio-cultural contexts evidence different value sets as well as norms of behavior". As such, leaders are required to adapt their leadership behaviours to align with societal values and norms to achieve the best results.

Economic context - the level of economic development within a country, will determine much of the opportunities and challenges facing a principal in a school, as they consider the resources at their disposal based on the needs of their community.

Political context - recognises how this aspect of society influences and shapes the beliefs, attitudes and practices of principals and the goals of education, outlined by the government, determine the level of support, funding and priority given to education in that country.

School Improvement context - considers the trajectory of improvement for a school. These can be described in four ways; effective, improving, coasting and ineffective. The state of improvement can be determined by the "normative ways in which school staff think, act and respond to different situations" (Hallinger, 2016, p.15). This insight into culture will provide a

principal with important information to understand what leadership is required to seek the best results.

Longmuir (2017) provided clear examples of how the principals' behaviours and intentions worked across multiple contexts and could be applied to each context; however, it is not clear whether these were intentional. The schools outlined by Longmuir (2017) identified how the principals responded to the needs of the school context, but also how they leveraged elements of the context to support the transformation they wanted to take place, i.e. one community was seeking something different for their children to provide an alternative education setting to what was otherwise on offer (Gurr, Drysdale, Longmuir & McCrohan, 2018). Murakami, Gurr and Notman (2019), in their book titled, 'Educational Leadership, Culture and Success in High Need Schools' draw together studies from across the world that highlight how school leaders have adapted their practices to suit the high need school context. Examples include how a school in Belize connected their curriculum to the current interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) education and the local industries. It was highly likely these industries would employ these students in the future. Another example from New Zealand, described how teachers in an early childhood setting focussed on helping the parents of the students in their centre become better parents. What was apparent throughout the case studies in Murakami et al. (2019) was the evidence of the core leadership practices of setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and improving teaching and learning. These practices were visible to different degrees dependent on the school context. School leaders adapting their practice to suit the context is not new, as Day et al. (2010, p.19) in their paper titled, 'Ten strong claims about leadership' that "Differences in experience and context affect the nature, direction and pace of leadership actions". This highlighted that success can be achieved in many ways. Despite this claim, there has been a lack of focused case studies to illuminate the point, hence the focus of this study.

Within the Day et al (2010) paper, it recognised that the improvement stage a school could identify with, in this case; low start, moderate start and high start improvement stages, determined the leadership practices required. Schools identified as low start would require wholesale changes across the board and therefore, the principal would be enacting many of the core leadership practices simultaneously. This model is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter (see Table 2.2).

This research strand of the ISSPP leadership is providing key insights into how school leaders are influenced by the context variables they are faced with. Gurr et al (2018) concluded that context does matter and influences the decision making of the school leader and that no matter

how dire the context, it is not insurmountable. This thesis will consider the practices and characteristics utilised by a principal in a low educational advantage school on an improvement journey. The improvement journey of these schools began at a point where they were underperforming compared to like schools. The concept of underperformance will be explored to contextualise the situation these schools found themselves.

2.10 Underperforming Schools

With such a focus on effective schools and leaders, research has neglected leadership at the other end of the performance scale, in schools that underperform. Despite schools meeting national standards, it is possible these same schools may be underperforming when compared with schools of similar social and economic advantage. These schools can be described as cruising schools; one "which appears to be effective based on accepted measures, but is resting on its laurels, has little capacity to adjust to societal change and is, or is becoming, ineffective for a significant percentage of its pupils" (Stoll & Fink, 1998, p.189). What can be more visible, especially to the media and therefore the general public, are schools that are underperforming in comparison to national standards. These schools are failing schools. Despite much financial assistance, they have been unable to turn around their performance. Although school underperformance can exist in any context, these schools are more often than not found in socially and economically disadvantaged areas. The common misconception associating underperformance with contexts of low educational advantage is driven by the fact that level of underperformance is clearly visible when compared to national or state benchmarks. However, schools in challenging contexts can make a difference and overcome the social and economic problems that exacerbate the challenges they face in these contexts (Harris, 2010). What leadership practices and characteristics enable schools to do this will be discussed later in this thesis.

The concept of underperformance in education dates back to the 1960's. The following section will provide an insight into how society has measured and defined underperformance in schools.

2.10.1 Underperformance defined

Underperformance in education has been referred to using a raft of different terms; 'sinking' schools (Stoll & Meyers, 1998), failing (Barber, 1998; Lodge, 1998; Murphy & Meyers, 2008), ineffective (Lodge, 1998), struggling (Barber, 1998) and at-risk (Leithwood et al., 2010). The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspections in England have developed the underperforming vernacular with references to phrases such as 'schools in difficulty', a 'school

requiring special measures', 'schools with serious weaknesses' and a school which 'requires improvement' (OFSTED, 2012b). American literature identifies some schools as 'chronically low performing schools', (Hassel & Steiner, 2003).

From the numerous terms used to describe a school that is not delivering on the expectations held by a government or a community, one could empathise with Hansen's (2012) frustration about the vast amount of literature that was beginning to target underperformance in education with no standard definition. This was not entirely true, as some definitions of underperformance were determined by "the criteria and benchmarks set for judging adequate performance" (Leithwood et al., 2010, p.36). Corallo and McDonald (2001) and Duke (2010) agreed with this, commenting that underperformance is when a school does not meet the standards established and monitored by the leading educational body in the country or state. Van de Grift and Houtven (2007, p. 383) are quite explicit in their definition of underperformance, stating that this "phenomenon can be viewed as an indicator for very poor academic performance results". They elaborate further by explaining underperforming schools are those that "have not been achieving academically in line with students in schools with similar demographics" (Van de Grift & Houtven, 2007, p. 384).

Following on from Van de Grift and Houtven (2007) relating academic underperformance and the school's student population, Goldschmidt, Choi and Beaudoin (2012) completed an analysis of multiple growth models and found the performance of schools would vary depending on whether consideration of student intake characteristics beyond the school control was taken into account. Heck and Hallinger (2009) believe that modelling growth in achievement over time is a more equitable way of identifying the added value a school makes to student achievement as opposed to using outcome levels. Choi, Goldschmidt and Yamashiro (2005, p. 120) acknowledged the difficulty in developing an accountability model (measure of performance) that "can accurately capture the academic progress of underprivileged students (e.g., low socioeconomic status), and by extension, underprivileged schools". Therefore, questions must arise about the tool used to measure school performance as to whether comparisons can be made between students and schools from different contexts. Such a finding is supported by Leithwood et al. (2010, p.37), who suggest that "the definition of a failing school is relative. There is no absolute measure" and, as such, school level academic performance cannot be the sole indicator of school performance.

What role does context play on student outcomes? As this thesis is specifically targeting low educational advantage settings, the following section will share what research currently understands about the influence of context on school performance.

2.11 Context and School Performance

Measuring underperformance by relying on the performance of students in testing situations is fraught with inconsistencies and questions. Researchers agree, there are multiple factors that identify an underperforming school (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Murphy and Meyers (2008) identify external and internal factors that lead to a school's decline or failure. The authors do make a point of stating that although schools will be faced with unexpected external factors that will cause turmoil, the school's ability to respond to these situations will determine how quickly the school will bounce back. This suggestion subtly highlights the important role of the school's leadership in such situations.

What is known from research is that there are some common features that exist when analysing the external factors of underperforming schools. These include such things as the urban setting (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004; Murphy and Meyer, 2008), minority population and the low socioeconomic status (SES) of its students (Moreira, Dias, Vaz & Vaz, 2013; Murphy & Meyer, 2008; Van de Grift and Houtven, 2007; Zoda, Combs & Slate, 2011). In fact, these 3 factors correlate highly and all are found in many underperforming schools (Murphy & Meyer, 2008).

Chudgar and Luschei (2009, p.628) make it very clear in their analysis of countries performance in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) as a basis for their cross-national study of achievement that "children whose families have higher SES, more learning-related resources and better educated parents tend to perform better in school". Although, as Hassel and Steiner (2003, p.2) highlighted, schools that have failed their students are located in "poverty-stricken urban and rural areas", Harris (2010, p. 693) identifies the urban setting as a more common feature of underperforming schools stating that "Inner city areas in particular feature as having low educational outcomes". Mintrop (2003) also identifies the link between the urban setting and minority populations, noting a vast majority of these schools in inner city locations serve poor and disadvantaged minority populations. Muijs et al (2004, p.150) conclude "that there is a strong negative correlation between most measures of social disadvantage and school achievement". Harris (2010, p.693) considers the socioeconomic status of a community to conclude that "educational outcomes in deprived areas are worse than those in non-deprived areas". Harris (2010) elaborates her point further by identifying how the social composition of a school and community is a strong determinant of success and concludes that "children with low or average SES (socioeconomic status) tend to have better educational outcomes if they attend a school with high average SES. If they attend a school

where the mix is predominantly low SES, they are unlikely to make as much progress" (Harris, 2010, p.694).

One can only lament on the burden of socioeconomic status to a child's level of success and, overall, the performance of schools in low SES areas. But why is there such a difference? Harris (2010) highlights that schools in high SES areas tend to have higher expectations for their community, positive peer interaction and higher engagement from parents in their child's learning. Whereas schools servicing low SES communities "lack norms, expectations and values associated with high academic achievement and success" (Harris, 2010, p. 694). One could ask the question, with whom does the responsibility reside to set norms, expectations and values? Is it solely the leadership team?

There is enough research to show that a school's SES is not an excuse for its level of performance (Leithwood et al., 2010; Muijs et al., 2004). However, it is clear, that internal factors that influence performance, such as school leadership, must consider their context when considering turnaround procedures for their school to move from underperforming to effective.

With these external factors in mind, what is it that schools do differently that result in different performance levels with the same student intake in the same contextual setting? The following section will identify the internal factors schools can control to influence performance.

2.12 Internal Factors of School Underperformance

Although it is difficult for schools to control the external factors outlined in the previous section, Murphy and Meyer (2008) stress internal factors alone can push a school into decline. Such internal factors that lead to underperformance in schools can include; ineffective leadership (Bourn, 2006; Chapman & Harris, 2004; Duke, 2012; Finnigan, 2011; Hopkins et al., 1997; Houtveen, van de Grift, Kuijpers, Boot, Groot & Kooijman, 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyer, 2008; Orr, Berg, Shore & Meier, 2008), poor teacher quality (Ascher & Fruchter, 2001; Bourn, 2006; Chapman & Harris, 2004; Duke, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyer, 2008; van de Grift & Houtveen, 2007) and school culture (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Corallo & McDonald, 2001; Duke, 2010; Hopkins et al., 1997; Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyer, 2008, Orr et al., 2008).

It is a long held view that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its influence on student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2017). School leadership is paramount in developing the right culture characterising an effective school. Within this culture will be the attitude required of staff to build capacity to improve teacher quality. These internal factors

will be explored in greater detail to understand how they can contribute to the performance levels of a school.

2.12.1 School Leadership and Performance

When reviewing leadership in underperforming schools the difference to effective schools is stark, Duke (2010) identified that problems facing low performing schools are they appear adrift and detached. Bourn (2006) recognised that leaders within an underperforming school were unable to identify a school's strengths and weaknesses or to develop a plan to build capacity of staff as a way to improve. School leaders are described as weak (Bourn, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010), ineffective (Bourn, 2006), passive, disinterested and ignorant of their school's academic program (Stringfield, 1998). These same leaders show practices and characteristics such as; lack of vision, poor communication, inattention to teaching quality, a failure to make decisions (Leithwood et al., 2010) and an inability to recognise a need for development (Stoll & Fink, 1998). School leaders demonstrating these characteristics are not going to support or enhance the other areas highlighted in this section; teacher quality and school culture. It is understandable that the external factor of a context of low educational advantage would exacerbate the inadequacy of ineffective leadership.

2.12.2 Teacher Quality and Performance

Murphy and Meyers (2008) listed the specific factors that characterised poor teacher quality, which included; limited skills and knowledge, inexperience and teachers teaching outside their specialty. Van de Grift and Houtven (2007) concurred with the fact that poor teacher quality was linked to insufficient knowledge about how students can achieve. Stringfield (1998, p.211) observed that an ineffective classroom consisted of;

> "significantly lower rates of student time on task, less teacher presentation of new material, lower rates of teacher communication of high academic expectations, fewer instances of positive reinforcement, more classroom interruptions, more discipline problems, and a classroom ambience generally rated as less friendly".

With this in mind, it is no surprise that underperformance is fuelled by the quality of teaching. This link is highlighted by Murphy and Meyers (2008, p.263) in their research that identified "poor or inadequate teaching is the most cited internal cause of school failure". They elaborated on this point by acknowledging that it was possible that the lack of support to adequately prepare teachers to cope with the demands of classroom teaching contributed to this finding (Murphy & Meyers, 2008).

2.12.3 School Culture and Performance

Stoll and Fink (1998, p. 191) describe school culture as "hard to capture because it is largely implicit and we only see surface aspects" but they recognised the significant influence school leadership had on a school's culture. Sergiovanni (1984) also demonstrates a clear link between school culture and leadership practices by observing that schools with stronger cultures tended to have high expectations with a clear vision. This strong vision "provides a set of norms that defines what people should accomplish and how, and provides a source of meaning and significance for teachers, students, administrators and others as they work" (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 10). It is from this observation by Sergiovanni that one can state that ineffective leadership will likely result in a weak school culture.

Although school culture is identified as a key area of required change in an underperforming school, it is also one of the most difficult to change. Developing a strong culture built on respect and performance requires clear direction by the leadership group for staff and by teachers for pupils (Muijs et al., 2004). The cyclical effect of a poor culture is that it will lead to high staff turnover, a key characteristic of an underperforming school, which in turn, can make it difficult to develop a high performing culture. To develop a high performing culture there is much that education could learn from large corporations. Through a case study Ready, Hill and Thomas (2014) illustrated what needs to be considered for large corporations to develop a high performing culture and much of this could be transferred to an education setting.

According to Ready et al. (2014), it is essential that the right people are placed in the right roles. As discussed earlier, the effective school leader will ensure their teachers are teaching in areas of expertise. This is not always the case in an underperforming school. In contrast, high performing businesses see their employees as a "strategic and scarce resource" and critical to the accountability of its business (Ready et al., 2014, p.65). In maintaining their culture, a large corporation will "live by and teach the guiding principles" (Ready et al., 2014, p.66), which are regularly shared with their employees. This is seen by "breaking down silo behaviour and driving harder to create a stronger high-performance culture" (Ready et al., 2014, p.66). The high performance culture includes such elements as ensuring employees are continually developed, employees undergo talent reviews and collaboration between employees is fostered (Ready et al., 2014). Although it would be easy to suggest that school leaders should demonstrate the same practices and expectations to ensure performance levels are met and exceeded, what is clear is that leadership is essential in developing a high performing culture. It is easy to see the link between the practices and characteristics of business leaders developing a high performing culture and the core practices required of a school leader.

The degree of absence of the internal factors highlighted in this section, teacher quality, school leadership and school culture, will lead to a degree of underperformance. Underperformance over a period of time results in school failure. To overcome school failure, a school must undergo turnaround reforms. This next section will explore the notion of what is required to turn a school around from ineffective and what role leadership plays in this process.

2.13 Turning Schools Around

A consistent element when identifying an underperforming school is that there are many factors that can lead to underperformance. Leithwood et al. (2008, p. 25) state quite clearly that the "reasons for school failure are rarely one-dimensional or singular". Identifying underperformance is the first step in what is now commonly referred to as the turnaround process. A school requires turning around if, as Jensen and Sonnemann (2014, p.3) describe, it experiences "persistent symptoms of school ineffectiveness, including poor school culture and attendance and staff problems". Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) note that in Australia, if a school's performance on NAPLAN testing identifies their students at two or more years below the national average for five consecutive years, this signifies an underperforming school that requires turning around. Bourn (2006) highlighted many characteristics for a school requiring turnaround, including; weak leadership, poor standard of teaching, a lack of external support and challenging circumstances. Although the characteristics of a school requiring turning around seems to negatively correlate with the core practices of an effective leader, it is not as simple as implementing these core practices. The context within which the school finds itself will determine the approach a school leader must take to turn it around. As Duke (2006, p.730) highlights, "each school and community is characterised by idiosyncratic features that influence any effort to introduce change". Duke (2006) and Bourn (2006) agreed on a number of key characteristics that became the focus of a turnaround effort. These included;

- School leadership
- Teacher's collaboration
- Building the capacity of staff

Each of these key characteristics could be elaborated further; however, it is the area of leadership this thesis will remain focused on. Leadership, in fact, would influence each of the areas listed and it is therefore prudent to consider what turnaround leaders do in turnaround schools.

2.13.1 What Turnaround Leaders Do in Turnaround Schools

Fullan (2006) argues that school improvement is not about the quick fix, which seems to be the common theme found in much of the turnaround literature to date (De la Torre, Allensworth, Jagesic, Sebastian & Salmonowicz, 2013; Fullan, 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2008). Rather, it is about "crafting a strategy to blend pressure and support in a way that effectively motivates people to lend their ideas and energy to collectively address what needs to be done" (Fullan, 2006, p.43). This idea relates to the core practice of setting clear directions, where Bandura (1986) identified that motivated people want to achieve goals that are personally significant to them. Fullan (2006) connects with the core practices of school leadership that need to be addressed to ensure effective change can take place. These include; being clear on what is to be achieved (setting direction), address the three basics of literacy, numeracy and well-being (managing the teaching and learning program), develop respectful and positive relationships across the entire community (redesign the organisation), build the capacity of teachers (develop people) which will lead to an improved confidence amongst staff and create internal accountability structures that are linked to external accountability measures.

Leithwood et al. (2010) take this notion of leadership and change one step further in their publication, 'Leading School Turnaround', by identifying the different stages of a school turnaround and describe how the core practices of successful leaders are used during each of these stages. The authors illuminate the fact that there is no correct approach to turning around a low performing school, but that a leader is pivotal in its success in identifying the stage, need and readiness of the school community to undergo, continue or maintain the turnaround process. Leithwood et al. (2010) provide three broad stages which a school leader will move through for a successful turnaround to take place. The authors recognise that the first phase of turnaround is recognising the deficits of the school and shifting quickly to what is required for improvement to take place. These phases outlined in Table 2.2 can draw comparisons with the phases of leadership success developed by Day et al. (2010).

Whilst, one can argue that a turnaround school must be characterised by certain dire features, the improvement journey a principal must take will be very similar whether starting from a point of near closure and needing to turn around or 'declining', 'underperforming', 'challenging circumstances' etc.

Table 2.2: A comparison of the phases of leadership success with the stages a school leader moves through for turnaround success

10 Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu and Brown, 2010	Leading School Turnaround Leithwood, K. Harris, A. and Strauss, T. (2010)
Early Phase - improve the physical environment - Creating supportive teaching and learning conditions - Create a school-wide discipline approach - Restructure the school leadership team - Implement performance management systems for all staff	**Stopping the decline and creating conditions for early improvement** - Staff meeting low expectations - Low achievement - Lack of vision and ad-hoc communication - Limited collaboration on school improvement initiatives - Inconsistent and untargeted resourcing for improvement - Principals and teacher leaders do not act as role models - School demonstrates limited school-home partnership
Middle Phase - distribute leadership - data informed decision making to support improved teaching and learning	**Ensuring Survival and realising early performance improvements** - Develop clear and high expectations - Focus on improving achievement levels - Collaboration in school improvement plans and professional learning - Consistent approaches to teaching and discipline - Development of collective efficacy - Professional development becomes professional learning - Active school-home and school-community partnerships sought - School uses data to inform teaching and tracks individual growth of students
Later Phase - personalising and enriching the curriculum - wider distribution of leadership	**Achieving satisfactory performance and aspiring to much more** - Common goals across school that are revisited by the team regularly - Strong accountability for improving achievement - Targeted individual support where required - Ongoing professional learning made available - Collaboration is structured into the school day - Community events are a regular occurrence - Continuity of learning from primary to secondary school sought - Targeted teaching recruitment for school improvement - School tracks individual growth of students and provide individual intervention on a needs basis

In their first phase, Leithwood et al. (2010) model recognises some of the poor characteristics that may be seen in schools prior to the turnaround; whereas, in Day et al. (2010) first phase, they identify the first steps required to improve a school.

The second stage of Leithwood et al. (2010) contains much of what Day et al. had in their first phase with some similar practices from their second phase. The last phases recognised by both models indicate greater distribution of leadership, which is reflected by a greater emphasis on collaboration in Leithwood et al. (2010) model and the personalising of the teaching program for the learners. Such continuums are valuable for school leaders as they provide guidance and a sense of direction, which is essential when a school is failing its community. What is clear from these continuums are that not one style of leadership is going to meet the needs of a school experiencing a school improvement journey. The next section identifies the different leadership styles research identifies as necessary for schools in challenging contexts.

2.14 Leadership of Schools in Challenging Contexts

Throughout this chapter we have regularly referred to the core practices of a successful leader; setting clear directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the teaching and learning program. Leithwood (2005, p.620) refers to these as "the basics" of school leadership, but "probably not sufficient for success, but necessary in almost all contexts". He elaborates on this claim in his 2005 Willower Family Lecture (2006, p.188), by stating, "there always will be and should be variations in the way they are enacted. And there may be a need to add to these basics in some circumstances". The research of Chapman and Harris (2004) and Harris (2010) supports this notion by claiming that successful leadership in challenging circumstances can vary greatly from other contexts. Research has shown the more socially disadvantaged a school is, the more likely it is to underperform (Reynolds, Harris, Clarke, & James, 2006). It can also be ascertained from this research that there are certain practices and characteristics that leaders require depending on the context, culture and stage of improvement of their school (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Hargreaves, 2010; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2010; Muijs et al., 2004; Reynolds, 2005; Stoll, Reynolds, Creemers & Hopkins, 1996). Complementing the practices and characteristics of the school leader is a leadership style that supports this process. This leadership style must also be adaptive to the stage of school improvement.

The following section will identify the four leadership styles that correlate with successful school leaders and consider how these would be most effective to lead a school in a challenging context. These leadership styles are;

- Transformational
- Instructional
- Distributed
- Sustainable

2.14.1 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a recommended style for transforming an underperforming school to an effective one. This style of leadership is characterised by an ability to recognise the change that needs to happen for learning to improve (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). Much has been written about the transformational leader and their role in inspiring and motivating others to perform at a level otherwise unattainable. Bass and Avolio (2000, p. 10) describe transformational leaders as those that "motivate others to do more than they originally intended and more than they thought possible. They set more challenging expectations, raise levels of self and collective efficacy and typically achieve significantly higher performance." Bass (1985) recognised a transformational leader presents well when conditions are unpredictable, difficult, and stressful, akin to an underperforming school. In such a setting, transformational leaders are best placed to improve the capacity of their staff and be more prepared to address the many challenges an underperforming school will face (Bass, Avolio, Dong & Berson, 2003). This leader will move a school with an embedded culture of low expectations, morale and a lack of direction to one that is looking to "satisfy higher needs and engage the full person as the follower" (Chapman & Harris, 2004, p.225). Pepper (2010, p. 46) describes the transformational leader engaging with the school staff "to focus on a common vision and to take ownership of the change process through a collaborative approach". Collaboration and continual inquiry, is what Hitt and Tucker (2016) identified as essential ingredients for transformational leaders to achieve a positive organisational culture and develop a collective efficacy that will help transform a school and increase student achievement.

Caldwell (2006, p.15) further defines the type of change process required for transformation to take place, with particular emphasis in challenging circumstances, as being "significant, systematic and sustained, resulting in high levels of achievement for all students in all settings". For this to be achieved, Caldwell (2006) argues learning must become personalised. The UK Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2004, p.4) outlined a five year plan that sought greater personalisation in their schools, describing the aim to transform "so that the system fits to the individual rather than the individual having to fit to the system". The DfES (2004, p. 4) aspiration was admirable;

> " It is about having a system which will genuinely give high standards for all – the best possible quality of children's services, which recognise individual needs and circumstances; the most effective teaching at school, which builds a detailed picture of what each child already knows, and how they learn, to help them go further; and, as young people begin to train for work, a system that recognises individual aptitudes and provides as many tailored paths to employment as there are people and jobs."

To achieve transformation to this level will require a leader committed to collaboration. This type of leader is a far cry from what schools once sought after, the heroic, charismatic leader. Through transformational leadership, it is hoped teachers will feel empowered and collaborate to achieve mutually agreed to tasks (Beverborg, Sleegers, Endedijk & Veen, 2017).

At the time of their writing, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) were critical of research into the transformational leader, particularly around the ambiguity of practices applied to a transformational leader, as well as the limited scope identified to which the transformational leader's influence needed to infiltrate for change to happen. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) identified a number of specific dimensions when researching the effects of transformational leadership using three broad categories of leadership; setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organisation. In conclusion, the authors identified that transformational leadership has an important influence on the likelihood of teachers changing their classroom practice; however, it failed to identify the level of effect these changes had on students' learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). This concurred with Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe's (2008) meta-analysis of 22 studies. This study found a weak or insignificant effect size when exploring the influence of transformational leadership on student achievement (Fullan, 2014).

School improvement requires an effective leader that responds and adapts to the context they find themselves in. Transformational leadership will motivate and excite individuals to change but won't lead to success alone (Finnigan & Stewart, 2009). With this in mind, we will continue to look at other styles of leadership required through the journey of school improvement. .

2.14.2 Instructional Leadership

Along with transformational, instructional leadership is also cited as an essential style to ensure change in underperforming schools (Chapman & Harris; 2004; Harris, 2004; Muijs et al., 2004). Instructional leadership may also be referred to as learning centred leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009), pedagogical leadership or educational leadership.

This style of leadership is seen as integral to school improvement because it is effective in building teacher capacity, which in turn, advances student achievement. With this in mind, Robinson et al. (2008) completed a meta-analysis comparing the effects of instructional and transformational leadership on student outcomes, which ultimately found that instructional leadership will have three to four times more impact on achievement than transformational leadership. In Robinson et al. (2008, p.664) own words, "the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students' outcomes". There is much research to support the significance of instructional leadership on student achievement (Boyce & Bowers, 2018; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Louis et al.,2010). Ylimaki, Jacobson and Drysdale (2007) acknowledge instructional leadership is essential in underperforming schools because these schools often have fewer resources to develop teachers; therefore, the school leader is relied upon to engage staff in the process of improvement, offering intellectual stimulation and individualised support for teachers.

Robinson (2010) took the understanding of the impact of instructional leadership further to identify the leadership capabilities required of an effective instructional leader. These capabilities included;

- Solves complex tasks
- Builds relational trust
- Integrates educational knowledge

These were drawn from a literature review that included studies with empirical evidence and/or strong theoretical arguments for the role of that particular capability. The shift from the broad instructional leadership label to one where specific behaviours, attributes and understandings are more apparent has happened in the last 30 years to allow more quantitative research to unfold and to prepare future leaders with more certainty of what expertise is required. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) undertook the first attempt to identify what principals do to lead in the area of curriculum and instruction. The authors developed dimensions of instructional management by reviewing previous research on the role of instructional managers. These dimensions were identified as;

- Defines the Mission
- Manages Instructional Program
- Promotes School Climate.

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) identified more narrowly defined job functions. The detail of these job functions provided greater clarity around the practices of an instructional leader.

Studies that used Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) framework were successful in advancing the field with more evidence to support the work around instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005, 2011a). This work led to a broader view of instructional leadership as it was reframed as leadership for learning to consider elements of leadership that were once considered unique to instructional, transformational or shared styles of leadership. 'Leadership for learning' looks beyond just influencing classroom instruction and includes all actions undertaken to improve school outcomes that is attributed to student learning, from multiple leadership sources beyond just the principal. Hallinger (2011a) created a synthesised model of leadership for learning that assumed three important elements;

- The concept of leadership for learning is enacted within an organisational and environmental context. The importance of this is recognised by the purpose of this thesis and the aim to enhance our understanding of what influence the context has on leadership and leaders.
- The act of leadership is influenced by the personal characteristics of leaders. This assumption forms an integral part of this study, as the characteristics of the school leaders are analysed and reported on to provide insight into what can enhance and inhibit practices of school leaders.
- Leadership indirectly influences student achievement through school level processes and conditions. Using this model one can make connections between these processes and conditions and a number of the core practices of a successful leader;
    - Vision and Goals (set clear directions)
    - People Capacity (Develop people)
    - Academic Structures and Processes (Manage the Teaching Program)

Boyce and Bowers (2018) in their meta-narrative review of the conceptualisation of instructional leadership over the last 25 years confirmed this movement of instructional leadership being a principal centred practice to one that is more a culmination of instructional, transformational and shared when analysing Marks and Printy (2003). In their paper, Marks and Printy (2003) focused on school leadership relations between principals and teachers and recognised the need for teachers to be more involved in the decision making around the curriculum and instruction. This shift would encourage principals to "seek(s) out the ideas, insights, and expertise of teachers in these areas and work(s) with teachers for school improvement. The principal and teachers share responsibility for staff development, curricular development, and supervision of instructional tasks. Thus, the principal is not the sole instructional leader" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p.371). Such a shift supports the lack of time

principals were actually found to be in classrooms (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). To do this, Marks and Printy (2003) outlined a theoretical model combining transformational leadership with shared instructional leadership, coining the phrase, 'integrated leadership', thus providing the motivation, drive and collective efficacy of the school community to achieve a common goal with a focus on the day to day business of curriculum, instruction and assessment. They justify their reasoning for this model by identifying how the expectations of a principal has evolved over the last 30 years. During the 1980's, principals were focused on managing school processes and procedures related to instruction and supervision. Throughout the 1990's principals became transformational change agents through times of school reform. In doing so, they became more accountable for school improvement and student achievement. Thus, returning their attention to the introduction of common standards, curriculum frameworks and assessment, principals needed to consider a different approach to influencing pedagogy and curriculum. This led to a principal having a more interactive role with teachers, describing this as shared instructional leadership.

The pressures of school reform remain today; however, the concept of shared practice involving the leadership of curriculum and instruction provides a timely segue into distributed leadership as a key driver within a school improvement process.

2.14.3 Distributed Leadership

The use of the term, 'Distributed Leadership' has become popular in recent times, as schools look beyond the single influence of the heroic principal leader (Timperley, 2005). Also referred to as shared, collaborative and democratic (Harris, 2006; Klar, Huggins, Hammonds & Buskey, 2016; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004), distributed leadership looks beyond what leaders are doing to how leaders combine and use their collective skills and understandings to contribute to the achievement and performance of the organisation (Harris, 2006). This distribution of leadership can protect a school, particularly those on school improvement journeys, from the loss of key leaders (Robinson et al., 2008). Gronn (2003) set about identifying the opportunity for organisations to move away from the heroic leader, to the idea there is greater value for an organisation if groups of people work in concert to achieve its goal, i.e. distribute or share their leadership. He described this concertive action in three different ways; Spontaneous Collaboration, Intuitive Working Relations and Institutionalised Practices.

Spontaneous Collaboration occurs when two or more leaders work together to overcome a problem or identify a better way of doing something. These collaborations may be short term or develop into regular, sustained practice.

Intuitive Working Relations is evident over a period of time whereby two or more leaders are working together towards a common goal. Each leader knows what strengths they offer in the partnership and recognise and rely on the strengths of their partners.

Institutionalised Practices are observed through more formal collaborative practices used by the organisation to meet the demands of the task. These collaborative practices may be organised or ad-hoc in nature.

Timperley (2005) draws from the work of Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), to describe how it is not the hierarchical structure that determines the leader of a task or situation but the level of expertise and understanding required to successfully lead. If employing such a dynamic approach to leadership, Gronn's description of concertive action would be recognisable through the structures and day to day interactions within an organisation.

Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss and Sacks (2008) use Gronn's concept of concertive action to identify four of their own patterns of distributed leadership; planful alignment, spontaneous alignment, spontaneous misalignment and anarchic misalignment, and researched the relationship these had to a set of teacher beliefs (trust, efficacy, organisational citizenship behaviour), which had been proven to influence student learning . Connecting these to Gronn's framework, Mascall et al. (2008) research identified that planned actions of distributed leadership led to more productive contributions to the outcomes of an organisation. These four patterns of distributed leadership are recognisable in a school organisation through structures such as faculty groups and mini schools. With so many necessary groups and sub-groups within a school, it is easy to understand the possibility of planned and spontaneous alignment of opportunities to enhance the benefits of distributed leadership. Alternatively, in low performing schools, one can imagine the possibility for misalignment.

Harris and Chapman (2002) see distributing leadership as an opportunity within schools to develop and support teacher leaders. It is believed that "distributed leadership is most likely to contribute to school improvement and to build internal capacity for development" (Harris, 2004, p.13). One of the key reasons for this is in the way it brings teachers together and draws out the expertise from within the group, highlighting the collective leadership of the staff. This is in line with Caldwell's description of the integrating themes for 'new leaders', which as he describes, should be embedded in the "every day work of the school" (Caldwell, 2006, p 122);

Caldwell provides a framework for leadership in the school of the future and in doing so highlights the themes school leaders need to be aware of for transformational success in their organisation. These included;

- Schools cannot achieve expectations for transformation by acting alone or operating in a line of support from the centre of a school system to the level of the school, classroom or student. The success of a school depends on its capacity to join networks to share knowledge, address problems and pool resources
- Leadership is distributed across schools in networks as well as within schools

(Caldwell, 2006, p.122)

If well managed and planned, distributed leadership lends itself well to school improvement. Klar et al. (2016, p.132) outlined the role of leaders with a strong familiarity with the context in building the capacity of others by "creating leadership opportunities, facilitating the role transition, and providing continuous support through a cyclical process". Such a planned and practical approach to distributed leadership aligns itself well to those outlined by Gronn (2003) and Mascall et al. (2008) earlier in this section.

As the support for distributed forms of leadership grows, along with the empirical evidence to quantify its value, it is clear the value of a distributed leadership approach is seen as proactive to ensuring a school's improvement and effectiveness is driven by a group of people, as opposed to the one heroic leader. This distribution of responsibility will offer the ongoing benefit to an organisation of building the capacity of its workers more broadly, insuring it against a reversal of improvement or effectiveness when a leader departs. This is a timely segue to another leadership style that will serve a school well at a point of their improvement journey.

2.14.4 Sustainable Leadership

For change to be successful, sustainable leadership practices must be considered, as the leadership literature cites all too often that sustained improvement is rare (Fullan, 2006). Hargreaves and Fink (2006, p.1) acknowledge this immediately in their book by stating, "change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and even harder to sustain". Sustainable leadership complements distributed and instructional leadership well. In fact, Hargreaves (2009, p.193) states that distributed leadership is a form of sustainable leadership, "sustainable success in education lies in creating cultures of distributed leadership throughout the school community". Hagreaves (2009, p.187) also makes a strong connection with instructional leadership when he claims that sustainable leadership is "leadership that fully understands the nature and process of student learning, that engages directly and regularly with the learning and teaching in classrooms". The ultimate indication that a turnaround has been successful is that the performance level of a school is maintained. For this to take place Duke (2010, p.98) recognises that "sustaining school success ultimately depends on the quality and commitment

of a school's professional staff". Duke (2010) recognises developing a culture of success and recognition should be prioritised, as maintaining an effective school is very difficult when there is a high staff turnover, a common characteristic of an underperforming school.

It is clear that one leadership style is not sufficient for a school leader to move a school from underperforming to a more satisfactory level. It highlights the important role principalship has, especially in schools facing challenging contexts, of understanding the contextual variables present so as to implement the practices and characteristics of a leader that will be most effective at that point in time.

2.15 Summary of the Characteristics of Successful School Leaders

This chapter has recognised the characteristics required of a successful school leader to implement core practices essential for school improvement. These core practices of setting clear directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the teaching program will be present in all schools to differing degrees. The characteristics evident in a successful school leader implementing these practices include but are not limited to;

- Strong communication skills
- Adaptive leadership
- A commitment to change
- An ability to problem solve

Underperforming schools are often characterised by low expectations, an incoherent vision and a lack of performance management of staff (Bourn, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2010; Stoll & Fink, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1984). As such, leaders employed to turn around a school in decline are characterised by an ability to articulate a clear vision for the school. Strong communication skills can motivate staff and inspire a collective ownership of what is to be achieved. A commitment to change is necessary to move a school from underperforming to one that sustains improvement through improved structures and a teaching and learning program that is coherent and engaging.

The value of such characteristics can be better understood when considering the leadership framework and models explored during this chapter. According to Leithwood et al. (2017) *Four paths framework*, school leaders can influence student achievement through rational, emotional, organisational and family paths. The variables within these paths demonstrate the scope of the challenge for school leaders and highlights the need for strong communication

skills to address the range of needs. The framework's variables also provide guidance to school leaders to help identify the areas to develop within a school improvement plan.

Hitt and Tucker's (2016) *Unified model of effective practices* emphasised the collaborative approach required by school leaders and teachers to raise achievement, while also highlighting the influence of leadership to drive change through a mixture of transformational and instructional practices. Such styles are an important characteristic of successful school leaders; however, it is the leader's ability to adapt their leadership style to the context or stage of improvement that is an essential feature of sustained success.

This adaptive leadership can be accredited to a school leader's ability to problem solve and identify what is needed for improvement to take place. Schools underperforming will need a transformational and instructional leader to move forward; Marks and Pinty (2003) identify this as integrated leadership. A leader who inspires and instructs will empower teachers and encourage collaboration. In particular, an instructional leader has proven to have great impact on student achievement, building strong trust with the community and solving the complexities of an underperforming community. As the school improvement journey matures, the distribution of leadership will become more apparent. This style of leadership is characterised by great trust and the recognition a school leader has of the collective expertise of a team. It also demonstrates their commitment to change school structures that they believe will improve the school's performance, such as the development of faculties or mini schools and building the capacity of staff. The commitment of a school leader to develop staff is essential to school improvement. A school leader must provide rich, ongoing professional development that meets the challenges faced by the school. This professional development should aim to enhance the collaborative practice within the school, which in turn helps to build a positive culture, all essential ingredients to sustainable improvement.

Leading an underperforming school in a challenging context requires a leader to problem solve their way forward. Navigating a disorderly environment, supporting staff that lack expertise and managing any number of challenges requires careful analysis and planning. During their research strand 3, the ISSPP revisited schools that had sustained success over a long period of time. The changing internal and external contexts of these schools required the school leaders to adjust their school improvement journey accordingly. This problem solving reiterated the importance placed on setting clear directions through strong communication skills, but also highlighted other traits essential in schools with challenging contexts; drive inspired by a philosophy of social justice, care, courage and resilience.

2.16 Conclusion

There is a great deal of responsibility that lies with school leaders to ensure they understand their school context and strategise a way forward for their school to improve its effectiveness. A school leader cannot assume the leadership practices and characteristics that have created effective schools before will work every time. The core practices of setting clear directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the teaching program, offer a certain amount of guidance but, as has been found, every school will require differing amounts of support and guidance with each of these practices depending on their context, culture and stage of improvement. A successful school leader in any context will be the one that can promptly assess the needs of their school and offer the right amount of leadership and support.

The intention of this research is to bring to light more evidence of what leadership does and looks like in the face of contextual variables, such as academic underperformance and low educational advantage. This thesis has highlighted that there are a set of practices that successful leaders use; however, it is essential that research discovers what leaders do in schools that are not performing and compare with what we do know about successful school leadership. This research will help improve the leadership within underperforming schools and, as a result, improve the learning outcomes of those students attending these schools. It is hoped that if the performance of these underperforming schools can be improved, greater equity in educational attainment will be achieved.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will illustrate the qualitative approach used as the methodology to identify the leadership practices and characteristics of principals of underperforming, low educational advantage secondary schools.

This investigation is supported by the guiding questions;

1. What are the practices and characteristics of school leaders in low advantage, improving schools?
2. How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in low advantage schools?

The aim for this study is to extend on what is already known about successful leadership practices by investigating the influence school context has on the leadership of principals in low educational advantage schools.

This chapter will begin by providing a rationale for the qualitative research undertaken followed by the extent to which this type of research has been used to study educational leadership. This chapter will then explain;

- The philosophical groundings of this study
- Research design
    - Selection of the schools
    - Case Study Approach
- Data analysis
- The ethics governing this study, and
- The limitations and delimitations of this study.

3.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is grounded in the social science fields of psychology, anthropology and sociology and uses people's judgements, ideas, attitudes and beliefs about the nature of things for empirical material (Berg, 2009; Walliman, 2011). Whilst qualitative data cannot be accurately 'measured' due to its descriptive quality; it is this description that generates the "richness and subtlety" that enable "great insights into human society" (Walliman, 2011, p. 73). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.3), these great insights come from the study of "things

in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". Merriam (2009, p.13) simplifies this naturalistic perspective by identifying the "overall purpose (of qualitative research) is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences". The primary attribute of such a naturalistic approach is that the research is conducted within the setting of the phenomenon of interest. Such research enables a more holistic view of the participants that could not be captured if they completed a quantitative survey or questionnaire (Bailey, 2007).

Miles and Hubermann (1994, p. 1) describe the value of qualitative data as "a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable contexts". This allows events and their consequences to be recorded, enabling researchers to generate or revise conceptual frameworks so we have "an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process of meaning making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (Merriam, 2009, p.14). Qualitative research is not used to test hypotheses but to lead the researcher towards a particular meaning (Lichtman, 2014). This is in contrast to using a quantitative approach to research, whereby a theory will be proven or disproven using deductive logic and by collecting data (Bailey, 2007). As Walliman (2011, p. 113) states, this data will be "in the form of numbers and uses mathematical operations to investigate their properties". In deciding whether qualitative or quantitative research is most appropriate for this study, Conger (1998) provides an overview of the benefits of using a qualitative approach over a quantitative one when researching school leadership. These advantages include;

- It is possible to explore leadership phenomena in significant depth and over time
- There is flexibility to make sense of unexpected phenomena during the research
- Researchers have the ability to investigate the processes that are discussed and observed more effectively,
- There are greater opportunities to explore and to be sensitive to contextual factors

For this study qualitative research was the most appropriate approach because the researcher was immersed within the context of the participants. During this time, the researcher aimed to make sense of the participants' everyday experiences through interviews, observations and the reviewing of school documents that guided and recorded their practice. Through such an immersion, it was expected that the researcher would gain a better understanding of the practices and characteristics of a school principal in an improving low educational advantage school. This sensitivity to people and their perspectives should enlighten our understanding of

leadership as a phenomenon and it will support the development of our understanding of how context may influence school leadership.

3.2.1 The Development of Qualitative Research in Education and Educational Leadership

The idea of using qualitative research in the field of education did not become common practice until the 1960's. Before this time, research in education had largely used a quantitative approach, as it sought to affirm the importance of education in society by identifying its value using a more scientific approach (Lichtman, 2014; Hallinger & Chen, 2015). Willard Waller, a pioneer in the use of qualitative research in education, uses this approach in his book, 'The Sociology of Teaching' (Waller, 1932). Waller's (1932, p. 3) publication depicting the realities of school life in order for teachers to "find their way more readily and accurately in the intricate maze of social life in school", is a clear example of the value qualitative analysis in education can have in unveiling the social world of schools. It also illuminates Waller as a qualitative researcher who, as Merriam (2009, p.13) describes, is interested in understanding the meaning people are making of their lived experience. Miles and Huberman (1984, p.15) described qualitative data as "attractive" to researchers because "they are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes occurring in local contexts".

As Bryman (2004) notes, it was not until the 1980's that qualitative research became common practice when investigating educational leadership. This approach began with the common practice of single case studies. Whilst the rich descriptions of these case studies were of great benefit to researchers, the limitation of using only one site did raise concerns of "representativeness" and "generalizability" of the findings (Bryman, 2004, p. 749). This is in contrast to this study, which will provide two case studies. The inclusion of multiple cases "offer the prospect of producing results that are less likely to be deemed to be idiosyncratic" (Bryman, 2004, p. 750). It will allow for an analysis of what the cases have in common or the differences between them (Flick, 2014). The use of a case study method will be discussed in greater detail later in this section.

In more recent times, qualitative data alone, or as part of a mixed methods approach to gathering data, has become an integral part of school effectiveness literature in maintaining a strong relationship between educational leadership and student outcomes (Louis et al., 2010; Bell, Bolam & Cubillo, 2003; Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). However, Teddlie (2005, p.216) noted the confusion about what constitutes the best approach to explore the connection between school leadership and student outcomes; stating "there is a lack of clarity regarding the best methods to further examine this link". Despite this, Teddlie (2005) did go on to say that

qualitative research provided the most evidence of the processes of effective leadership. This was largely due to the fact that qualitative data enabled researchers to highlight these processes and how they worked in schools of very different contexts (Teddlie, 2005). Conger (1998. p. 110) supports such a view in her article, which argued that qualitative methods provide greater value in studies of educational leadership because ”qualitative methods, in contrast, demand far greater immersion in the research site and offer more opportunities to capture a longitudinal perspective in investigations, particularly if participant observations are employed”. These observations supported the methodological process being undertaken in this investigation, as context played an important role in the data gathered about the practices and characteristics of a principal in a low educational advantage school. The multiple perspectives provided by other members of the school leadership team and staff gave insight into the practices and characteristics employed by the principal. This study also paved the way to make comparisons with findings from case studies observing principals in high educational advantage schools (Longmuir, 2017) to add to the longitudinal leadership study undertaken by the ISSPP.

There is not a strong representation of educational leadership research from the Asian region. A recent review by Hallinger and Chen (2015) of methodological approaches used when researching educational leadership in this part of the world found a strong preference for qualitative research methods; however, there was a beginning trend (2008-2012) for authors to use quantitative data in its analysis. Interestingly, this paper (Hallinger & Chen, 2015, p.6) highlighted the lack of research of educational leadership outside of mainstream western countries, which has resulted in “a limited understanding of how educational leadership and management is practiced outside of these contexts”. Being one of the initial aims of the ISSPP, it is hoped that this study, along with all of the work created thus far by the ISSPP, will help address this issue and shine an increasing light on educational leadership around the world.

3.3. Philosophical Groundings of this Study

3.3.1 Grounded Theory

This study used a grounded theory approach from the qualitative data that was drawn from the research group. Thornberg and Charmaz (2014) describe Grounded Theory as an approach “in which data collection and analysis take place simultaneously”. Day (2014, p.29) in the ISSPP research protocol document, ‘Conducting Research on School Principals: ISSPP Members’ Guide’ highlights the importance of not deferring the analysis; “it (data analysis) should begin early and proceed concurrently with the collection data in schools so that the two become closely integrated”. The importance of this, Merriam (2009, p.29) suggests, is that the end result

will provide “a theory that emerges from, or is “grounded” in, the data”. In fact, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p.6) state, “generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research”. This approach was enacted in this study through the gathering of different perspectives of the participants in their lived experience and through the multiple stages of collecting, refining and identifying the relationships between participants’ experiences, observations of the lived experiences and school documentation (Cresswell, 2014).

Although there is much we already know about school leadership, Leithwood (2005) and Klar et al. (2013) have identified the dearth of knowledge about how leadership is influenced by context. Whilst Hallinger and Heck (2011) also identified this, they suggested from the limited empirical data available that different styles of leadership would have varying degrees of success depending on the school context. The use of a grounded theory approach recognises the absence of a preconceived theoretical interest or expectation of a study and the aim that a theory or concept will “emerge as the research proceeds” (Bell, 2010, p.16).

This thesis used data from two different sites and multiple perspectives to theorise how the context influenced the school leadership. The data was collected, coded and analysed, and themes were considered alongside what had been observed and the documentation the school has produced and made available (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

According to Bell (2010) key aspects of using a Grounded Theory approach include;

- Not beginning with a hypothesis or a literature review and
- The data analysis begins before all the data is collected

Remaining consistent with this, the researcher reviewed literature focused on educational leadership and the challenges of context, in the lead up to the case studies. However, more research was subsequently required to inform the literature review in Chapter 2 following the completion of the case studies.

The researcher reflected on the data collected from the interviews each day and considered the line of questioning for the following day, making decisions on whether further elaboration on key themes were required. By doing this, the aim was for the collection and analysis of data to inform one another (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

3.3.2 Phenomenology

Along with a grounded theory approach, this study employed phenomenology to gather an understanding of the community's lived experience in a context of low educational advantage. Phenomenology focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into the consciousness (Merriam, 2009). The act of leading improving schools in contexts of low educational advantage have been around for as long as schools have existed; therefore, this study will explore what participant's experience of this phenomena has been. This study calls upon many stakeholders within a school; principal, teacher, school board administrator, parent and student to develop a complete understanding of the phenomenon of leadership in such a setting. This understanding was gained by conducting interviews (up to 60 minutes in length) using questions that directed the participants to provide perspectives on their everyday lived experience. This, according to Patton (2002, p.104) provides great detail of "how people experience some phenomenon - how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others". Completing three interviews with the principal and one with all other participants, ensures multiple perspectives of the school community are considered (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The experiences of the different stakeholders were analysed and compared to identify common themes (Mertens, 2010; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Luttrell, 2010).

3.3.3 Inductive Process

To honour the grounded theory approach and fully utilise the data gathered, an inductive process (see Figure 3.1) was followed to ensure the important patterns, themes and interrelationships were discovered (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002, pp.55-56) an inductive process "begins with specific observations and builds towards general patterns". Using an inductive process complements a grounded theory approach in that it is through the analysis of data that patterns will emerge and an understanding will be formed, that is the theories that will evolve from this study are "grounded in and (will) emerge from direct field experience" (Patton, p.56).

There are a number of other features of this research that lend themselves to using inductive analysis. The use of semi-structured interviews were supported by an inductive analysis, as these allowed the participants to describe their lived experience with regard to leadership in an improving school of low educational advantage. How these interviews were analysed is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter but an approach of first-level coding, followed by pattern coding, which leads to more general concepts being formed was used.

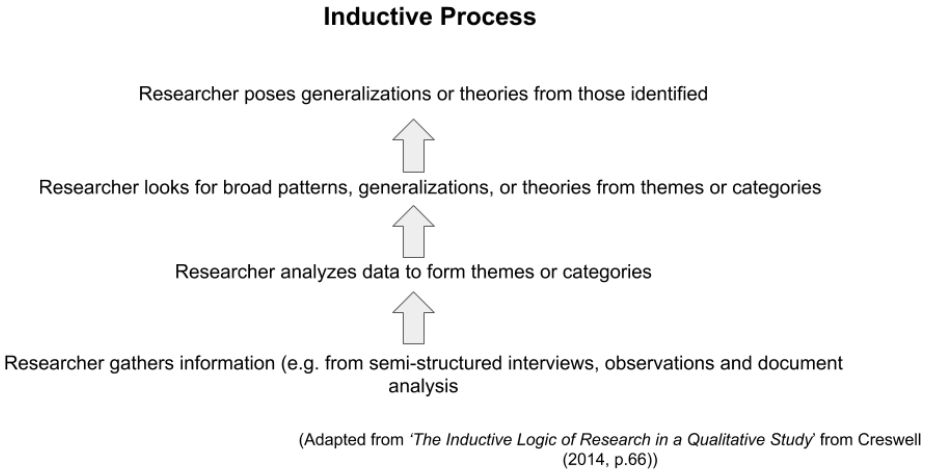


Figure 3.1: The inductive process followed in this study to analyse data

As there are two cases being developed as part of this study, a separate chapter that compares and contrasts each case has been included (see Chapter 6). Before this cross comparison occured, each case was completed separately, allowing each case to generate its own patterns and themes. Following this, the cross-case analysis took place whereby the researcher looked for those themes and patterns common to both, as well as distinct differences between each case study. The cross-case analysis required the researcher to return to each case and the data that was created for each. By staying grounded in each specific case, the emergent themes remained closely connected to the transcripts, observations and documents from which they were drawn (Patton, 2002).

3.4 Research Design

The ISSPP have accumulated a great deal of knowledge about the characteristics and practices of school principals over many years. They have drawn this knowledge using qualitative research techniques derived from the work of Miles and Hubermann (1994) that will be used for this investigation. This study aimed to add to this large body of knowledge and the methodological approach was guided by that which has been employed successfully for over 150 case studies by the ISSPP; a multiple-perspective, observational case study approach (Day, 2014). This approach was originally drawn from a study conducted by Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford (2000) and recorded in their book titled, 'Leading Schools in Times of Change'. The sustained use of this approach will allow for the continual knowledge accumulation within the framework of the ISSPP and develop further breakthroughs in

understanding the influence context has on the characteristics and practices of school leaders (Hallinger & Chen, 2015).

Developed by members of the ISSPP, Table 3.1 guides the methodology of this research. To date, the ISSPP has explored Quadrant A and B of the matrix. The focus of this thesis will research schools with a low educational advantage that are performing below expectations (visibly underperforming). These schools are located in Quadrant C.

The next section of this thesis identifies and elaborates on the selection criteria of the schools used in this case study.

3.4.1 Selection of schools for case study

Table 3.1: School classification by pre-requisites and results (adaptation from ISSPP model)

	Low Educational Advantage (ICSEA: 850 – 999)	High Educational Advantage (ICSEA: 1000 – 1150)
Results better than expected (NAPLAN Y5, Y9 literacy and numeracy and VCE all study above like schools)	Quadrant A: Low educational advantage, performing above expectations.	Quadrant B: High educational advantage, performing above expectations.
Results lower than expected (NAPLAN Y5, Y9 literacy and numeracy and VCE all study below like schools)	Quadrant C: Low educational advantage, performing below expectations.	Quadrant D: High educational advantage, performing below expectations.

Two Victorian government secondary schools were identified by using the following criteria;

- a Victorian secondary school
- the principal's length of tenure (3 or more years)
- the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is below the national average of 1000
- the school's NAPLAN performance has been below that of like schools (schools of similar ICSEA) for the previous 3 years
- the school's Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) mean score is below 30 for the previous 3 years.

3.4.2 Victorian Secondary Schools

The schools selected to study for each of the two case studies are Victorian government secondary schools.

Students in Victoria experience a preliminary year of formal schooling (Foundation) followed by Years 1 to 6 at primary schools. Schooling becomes compulsory in Victoria at the age of 6; however, students can begin their Foundation year of schooling as early as 4½ years old. More often than not, these schools are located separately to where students will undertake their secondary schooling from Year 7 to 12.

The age range for students beginning secondary school will be between 11½ and 13 years old. The minimum leaving age for students in Victoria is 17. Victorian secondary students must complete Year 10 and "participate full time in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until the age of 17" (ACARA, 2013, n.p.).

The schools selected for this thesis were Northern College and East Meadows College.

Northern College was established in 2007 from the amalgamation of three failing schools. It is a multi-campus school, two campus sites with Year 7 to Year 9 students and one campus for the Year 10 to Year 12 students.

East Meadows College was established in 1975 and is situated on one large site. The school is divided into sub schools; a junior school for the Year 7 to Year 9 students and a senior school for the Year 10 to Year 12 students.

3.4.3 Principal's Length of Tenure

When identifying schools that met the criteria of this study, an essential aspect was to consider the time the current principal had been employed. Earley and Weindling's (2007) model illustrates the stages of principalship a school leader transitions through. It demonstrates the time a school leader requires to create change and to expect improvement.

Stage 0—Preparation prior to headship

Stage 1—Entry and encounter (first months)

Stage 2—Taking hold (three to 12 months)

Stage 3—Reshaping (second year)

Stage 4—Refinement (years 3 to 4)

Stage 5—Consolidation (years 5 to 7)

Stage 6—Plateau (years 8 and onwards)

(Earley & Weindling, 2007, p. 74)

Although not necessarily new to principalship, principals in this study have had at least 3 years to put into action, strategies to build their vision for their current school. According to Earley and Weindling (2007, p.75) by their third year, principals are beginning to refine their leadership and "hit their stride". It is at this time that leaders are looking beyond the structural changes they feel are supporting the efficiency of the school and enabling staff more and refining curriculum changes and innovations. Mortimore et al. (1989) concur with this thinking. They recognised a headteacher who had spent less than three years in their present post was still classified as a new principal, and the pupils' progress and development tended to be poorer than expected. Whereas, schools with headteachers who had served between three and seven years had established themselves and had found they could "implement more effective management strategies" (Mortimore et al., 1989, p. 222). These headteachers tended to positively influence student progress in their schools (Mortimore et al., 1989).

The principal of Northern College was appointed in 2008 and retired shortly after the case study of the school was completed in 2015. Whereas, the principal at East Meadows College continues to lead the school after her appointment in October, 2014.

3.4.4 The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage

To measure the educational advantage of a school, a tool used by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) called the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was used. This tool has been used by ACARA to compare the achievement of students across Australia in their NAPLAN achievement by numerically representing the level of advantage the student brings to a test based on their families' background; a factor research supports is one of the most influential factors of student achievement (Chapman and Harris, 2004; Harris, 2009; Moreira et al., 2013; Zoda et al., 2011). As well as the student factors of parents' occupation and parents' education, the school factors of geographical location and proportion of indigenous students that make up the population of the school was considered.

The average value of the ICSEA is set at 1000, with a standard deviation of 100. ICSEA typically ranges from 500 (representing extremely educationally disadvantaged backgrounds) to about 1300 (representing schools with students with very educationally advantaged backgrounds) (ACARA, n.d.)

When this study researched low educational advantage, the schools ICSEA values at the time of interviews and observations were 882 (Northern College) and 981 (East Meadows College).

Whilst East Meadows College's ICSEA value is close to the average of 1000, there are a number of reasons why this school was a suitable candidate for this study.

East Meadows College profile demonstrated a school in crisis;

- It's enrolment numbers were in steep decline; in fact, they had halved in number between 2008 (721 students) and 2015 (346 students).
- In 2018, the school had 72 per cent of its student population in the bottom half of educational advantage; 42 per cent of those in the bottom quarter of educational advantage.
- According to the ACARA (2018), indigenous students made up 1.6 per cent of students in Victoria. Four per cent of East Meadows enrolments were indigenous, representing more than double the state average.
- The school environment was unsafe and disorderly; highlighted by the fact in 2010, there were 246 days of suspension compared with 10 days half way through the 2018 school year.
- The Department made the decision the school required an Executive Principal to be employed to ensure a principal with the right experience was appointed to improve the trajectory of the school.

These reasons made East Meadows a suitable candidate as a school with an experienced principal looking to improve the education experience for its students.

3.4.5 School Academic Performance

The performance of schools was based on publicly accessible data, such as NAPLAN and VCE results. This data enabled comparisons to be made with schools of a similar ICSEA to ascertain the level of performance based upon the demographic of the school. Schools that have performed below schools of similar ICSEA for 3 consecutive years were identified.

3.4.6 NAPLAN

NAPLAN is made up of the collection, analysis and reporting on an annual basis of student achievement in the area of reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy skills and knowledge (www.myschool.edu.au/naplan-explained#N1). The Year 9 NAPLAN data was used as most of the students had been at the school for the previous 2 years making them the best indicator of the school's influence on student learning. Schools were identified if their

performance fell below that of 'like' schools, according to the ICSEA rating, for the previous 3 years. A full summary of each school's NAPLAN performance prior to, and during the principal's tenure can be found in each of the case studies.

3.4.7 VCE

The VCE is the certificate that most students in Victoria receive on the successful completion of their secondary school studies. The results are recorded in terms of study scores, which are marked from 0 to 50. The mean score is 30. For the purpose of this research, as well as a school performing below 'like' schools in Year 9 NAPLAN, the school's VCE mean study score will also be below 30 for the previous 3 years.

Details of each school's performance is outlined in Chapter 4 (Northern College) and Chapter 5 (East Meadows College).

3.5 Case Study Approach

Once a school had been selected based on the criteria outlined, a multiple-perspective, observational case study approach was undertaken.

A case study, as Gillham (2010) describes, is the investigation of, in this case, multiple schools, to search for the answer to specific research questions from a range of best evidence available. The "best evidence" in relation to this study, is access to the principal and their immediate staff to provide multiple perspectives about the leadership in the school. These multiple perspectives will help identify the key practices and characteristics used by the principal. It is a strength of the case study that multiple sources of evidence are used (Gillham, 2010; Yin, 2009; Stake, 2005). These multiple sources also enhance the construct validity of the case study (Yin, 2009).

The importance of the case study to this research was captured by Yin (2009, p.18) who defines it as a tool to be used when "you wanted to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth, but such understanding encompassed important contextual conditions-because they were highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study". This focussed investigation is further endorsed by Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2009, p. 3) as comprising a specific inquiry that investigates a certain number of cases in varying degrees of detail, constructing the case "out of naturally occurring social situations".

The theme regarding 'observations of the phenomena', is strong throughout the case study literature. Stake (2005) believes a case study is a more effective way of adding to one's

understanding about a phenomenon because of their involvement in the gathering of data. Gomm et al. (2009, p.234) argue that "through case study we can actually *see* causal relationships occurring in particular instances". Gillham (2010, p. 2) echoes the words of Stake (2005) and Gomm et al. (2009), describing the benefits of case study research as a natural way to study "human phenomena, and what it means to be human in the 'real world as it happens'". Gillham (2010) supports the use of a case study approach when researching contextual conditions because until the researcher has gathered data from within the context, they will not be in a position to make any judgements or pose theories that apply to a particular setting. Yin (2009) argues that this approach will develop a clearer picture of the relationship between the context and focus of the study. Swanborn (2010, p.15) highlights the value of exploring within the "natural context of the phenomenon", especially, as Bryman (2004) concurs, if it comprises of multiple case studies, as this will allow the researcher to consider the degree of influence the social and physical contexts have on leadership. Bryman (2004, p.750) advocates for multiple case studies as it "enhances the researcher's capacity for drawing theoretical inferences". and avoids the question of low generalisability that is attributed to single case studies (Verschuren, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

3.5.1 Case Study Type

Yin (2018) provided the conditions by which case studies are characterised. The three forms of case study include; explanatory, descriptive and exploratory. These forms can best be analysed by asking three pertinent questions;

- What form is your research question?
- Does your research require control over behavioural events?
- Does your case study focus on contemporary events?

The case studies in this research are aimed to provide invaluable and deep understanding about the phenomenon of contextual variables and their influence on the practices and characteristics of a school principal, with the aim of generating "new learning about real world behaviour and its meaning" (Yin, 2014, p.4). Yin's (2009, 2018) questions outlined above provided an opportunity to apply these conditions to this thesis to understand how the different forms of a case study can be applied;

- Due to the open-endedness of the questions being posed, i.e. 'How does the context influence the leadership and the performance of underperforming schools?', a case study will provide an opportunity for rich descriptions of the phenomenon, particularly as the data will be drawn from natural settings, i.e. from within the school itself. Yin

(2009) assumes a case study provides a richness of data. The first question of this research will also require a level of exploration that the case study method supports.

- There will be a high level of access to the participants and the natural setting. As such, observations and interviews will be conducted. The interviews, semi-structured in their approach, will provide some structure and direction to the conversation; however, the participant will provide their own perspective in their responses, which will provide rich description of the phenomenon. The observations will be conducted as a passive bystander in a natural setting and therefore, no manipulation of the situation will take place. This approach will ensure the focus is on contemporary events.
- The opportunity to identify the practices and characteristics of a school principal in an improving low educational advantage school, will offer insights into the influence context has on school leadership. As this is a multiple case design, there will be an opportunity to compare the two case studies being completed. This will create greater reliability on what is discovered and allow more opportunity to analyse, explore and explain what similarities and differences existed between the principals leading a school with similar educational advantage (Swanborn, 2010). This study is also placed within a longitudinal study that includes case studies of schools with opposing demographics, allowing theories regarding the influence of context to be further examined.

A number of methods was used to gather data to inform each case study. These methods included interviews, observations and document analysis and follow closely the ISSPP methodology.

3.6 Interviews

As part of the case study approach and with an emphasis placed on gathering data from multiple perspectives, semi structured interviews formed an integral part of this process. The ISSPP acknowledged that to gather authentic and trustworthy data about the principal within a school, it needed to be gathered from those with close knowledge of him or her, i.e. students, teachers, parents, school board members (Day, 2014).

The ISSPP members guide for conducting research on school principals outlines three precepts that all project researchers abide to. These are;

- multi-perspective data about successful principalship will provide richer, more authentic data than has previously been available.

- Such data is best provided by those with a close knowledge of the principal, i.e. teachers, students, parents, non-teaching members of the school and other community members.
- Collaborative research designed to a set of agreed common protocols across English and non-English speaking countries will provide understandings of and insights into successful principalship and school improvement which will add to existing knowledge.

(Day, 2014, p. 9)

The multiple perspectives of this case were gathered from the principal, who was interviewed on three separate occasions, as well as individual interviews with numerous members of the school community. These members were identified as someone who could provide strong insight into the principals' characteristics and behaviours. Day (2014) outlines a suggested list of participants beyond the principal to interview;

- The school council president
- Another parent member of school council
- The assistant principal
- The curriculum coordinator, and
- Six teachers (where possible depending on school size).

As well as these individual interviews, it is suggested group interviews will take place with;

- Two groups of 5-8 parents, and
- Two groups of 5-8 students.

Access to all stakeholders will be subject to the discretion of the school principal (Day, 2014).

The case studies for this thesis are significantly different from one another. Case Study A (Northern College) is a multi-campus setting comprised of approximately 1100 students and 130 staff, whereas, Case Study B (East Meadows College) is a single campus school comprised of 250 students and 30 staff. Both have a student / staff ratio of about 8.4. The interview structure for each case study that formed this thesis included the following interviews as shown in Table 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.2: Interview participants at Northern College

Northern College - Case Study A		
Participant Category	Number of participants	Number of interviews
College Principal	1	3
Campus Principal 1	1	1
Campus Principal 2	1	1
School Council President	1	1
School Council Vice President	1	1
Leading Teachers 1 (Campus 1)	3	1
Leading Teachers 2 (Campus 2)	3	1
Leading Teachers 3 (Campus 3)	2	1
Parents	2	1
Students 1 (Campus 1)	5	1
Students 2 (Campus 2)	4	1
Education Support Staff	4	1
TOTAL	28	14

3.6.1 Structure of Interviews

The initial interview with the principal endorsed a mutual understanding about the purpose and structure of the visit. It also provided an opportunity to gain clarification and explanation of the background history of the school and the biographical data of the principal, provided through a questionnaire sent to the school prior to the visit. The other two interviews followed the interview schedule outlined in the ISSPP Materials for Conducting Research (Day, 2014).

The individual interviews included school leaders who work closely with the principal and group interviews with leading teachers, non-teaching staff and other members of the school who provided a perspective of the influence of the principal with the broader community, school and classroom level. The group interviews offered an opportunity for those less confident to work with their group's ideas to contribute to the conversation. This was mostly apparent in the student and parent group interviews. The parent interviews yielded groups that had not met each other before, which could have influenced their responses, as they may have felt they could not express their opinions openly for fear of being judged. The group interview with the leading teachers may have disadvantaged some teachers who felt restricted in what they could

say in the presence of their colleagues.

Table 3.3: Interview participants at East Meadows College

East Meadows College - Case Study B		
Participant Category	Number of participants	Number of interviews
College Principal	1	3
Assistant Principal	1	1
Curriculum Leader	1	1
School Council President	1	1
Business Manager	1	1
Leadership Coach	1	1
Leading Teachers 1	2	1
Leading Teachers 2	3	1
Leading Teachers 3	4	1
Parents	2	1
Students 1	4	1
Students 2	5	1
TOTAL	26	14

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. The use of semi-structured interviews, Drever (1995, p.7) states, are appropriate for a case study approach because the "researcher can adapt the main questions to suit people's complementary roles and can explore their different perspectives in depth". This approach particularly supported the student and parent interviews. The ISSPP provide a strong framework of interview questions to support this process. These open questions allow for "respondents to talk freely about what they perceive to be significant" (Day, 2014, p.15). The interview questions contained prompts and probes. Prompts encourage people to talk further about a subject that they know but have not yet mentioned (Drever, 1995). Probes look to provide more detail or clarification about something the respondent has already mentioned (Drever, 1995). The use of the prompts and probes will ensure the opportunity to gather reliable and valid data was optimised.

The interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes each and provided an opportunity for the principal and other stakeholders within the school to elaborate on specific detail.

These insights ensured rich data was gathered and that a balanced view of the principal was developed and reported, leading to further insights into successful principalship in a school of low educational advantage.

3.6.2 Interview Questions

Participants' questions included a number of broad themes. However, each of the interviews with the principal were influenced by the previous interview or interviews with staff that had raised themes that required further elaboration and the perspective of the principal. The questions themselves were designed to seek a better understanding of the principal's history, beliefs, values and experiences that had helped to shape their current lived experience. This background then provided a context for the vision, decisions and interventions undertaken by the principal to improve their school. The information gathered provided a strong connection between what the principal was doing, why they were doing it and what impact this was having on the school. The themes that were explored during each of the interviews is documented (a more detailed overview of the questions are included in Appendix A);

Principal

Interview 1 - Experience in education, leadership development, school vision, school culture, principal's school journey, assets and challenges of school.

Interview 2 - Plans for improvement of student growth, change management, ongoing challenges, leadership impact and evidence of this, contributions of others to change.

Interview 3 - Revisit themes that require further elaboration, recent changes in the school, ongoing challenges (revisited), successful interventions, leadership impact and evidence of this (revisited), description of leader for school improvement.

Leading Teachers - Teacher's history in education and at school, definition of success, description of principal's leadership, school vision, school culture, significant aspects that define the school, plans for improvement of student growth, description of change being undertaken by school, personal contribution to school improvement, essential characteristics and qualities of a leader for school improvement.

School Council Members - definition of success, description of principal's leadership, school vision, school culture, significant aspects that define the school, essential characteristics and qualities of a leader for school improvement.

Parents - significant aspects that define the school, attitude towards current levels of achievement, description of school leadership, essential characteristics and qualities of a leader for school improvement.

Students - Perceptions of the school, perceptions of school leadership and opportunities for the school in the future.

3.6.3 Audio recording

With the permission of the participants, each of the interviews were recorded so that transcriptions could be made to analyse. The importance of audio recording is to support the researcher in ensuring the conversation is as natural as possible, developing a greater rapport between the researcher and participant and enabling the researcher to be an attentive and thoughtful listener. The drawbacks of this approach was the possibility of malfunctioning equipment. To reduce the probability of this, two audio recording devices were used.

3.6.4 Interview etiquette

When introducing oneself as the researcher to the participant, it was outlined the reason and purpose for the study and the important contribution the participant can make. It was identified that the person was selected because the principal recognised them as having great potential to "contribute to the development of insight and understanding of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2009, p. 105). The aim was to make the participant as comfortable as possible so they were forthcoming in the information they provide. At this time, participants involved in individual interviews were also told that the transcription of the interview would be sent to them and they would be given the opportunity to ask questions for clarification, or to alter what they had discussed in the interview. As it was not possible to identify the individual responses of the participants in the group interviews, these transcripts were not sent to those involved.

At the beginning of each interview, every participant was read a summary of the research and asked to sign a consent form. Student participants were asked to take the consent form home to be signed by a parent or guardian and returned to the school reception.

The interviews took place in a quiet space in the school to ensure participants felt comfortable and the conversation remained confidential.

Although the interviews provided significant data for the case studies, Gillham (2000) noted, the relationship between beliefs, opinions, knowledge and actual behaviour is not a straightforward one and therefore, the use of observations within its case study are important to make connections between what is said and what actually happens in the school.

3.7 Observations

As a multi-perspective case study, observations added another perspective and provided valuable data to include with the interviews and documents. Observations allow for researchers to gain a greater insight into the principal and of the running of the school. As Simons (2009, p.55) outlines, observations benefitted this study in a number of ways, these included;

- Providing a comprehensive 'picture' of the site
- Providing 'rich description' to further analyse and interpret
- Discovering the norms and values, which are part of a school culture
- Interviews favour those who are articulate. Observations offer another way of capturing the experience of those who are less articulate
- Providing a cross-check on data gained from the interview process

Table 3.4: Number of hours for research observations

Activity	Northern College (hours)	East Meadows College (hours)
Assembly	1	1
School Tour	3	1.5
Classroom Observations	2.5	2.5
Staff Meeting	.5	2
Other Activities (e.g. Breakfast Club, Student Activities)	2	2.5
TOTAL	9	9.5

During this time, through negotiation with the principal, a number of school events were observed. A reflective journal was also kept by the researcher to record the observations made during this time. The reflective journal included observations of the events, along with the actions of those present during this time. An example of an observation made at Northern College at the beginning of one of their school days follows;

"When I (researcher) arrived at 8:15am, breakfast club was running. There were about 15 students in attendance. Toasted sandwiches, milk and milo, and fruit were offered.

> 8:30 – students were flowing in. They were all carrying bags (some fuller than others).

Children were being called by their names to collect their sandwiches. Even though the campus is approximately 500 students, there is a sense that everyone knows everyone. The students demonstrated respect through the way they addressed their teachers – generally as “Miss” or “Sir”.

Whilst I sat and observed, I was approached 4 or 5 times by students to see if I needed help. Interactions were positive and students were happy to chat.

At 8:40am, students were instructed to move to their lockers by the Year 10 leader (teacher). The Year 10 leader addressed the majority of students by name and even referred to the family members’ names of others.

Students wearing inappropriate uniform were asked to remove. In one case, the clothing item was kept at Reception for the day – the teacher knew it would just end up back on the student’s body. Students are expected to wear a blazer in winter – not a ‘spray’ jacket, as this student was.

Those students who came into the entrance closer to 8:45am or beyond were reminded that “Time Counts” (Students are expected to be seated at 8:45 am ready for when the teacher arrives. If they are marked as ‘late’ 3 or more times in a week, they make up 30 minutes of time at lunchtime).”

An example of an observation at East Meadows College included the following;

“Year 7 English Class – Afternoon period

Class set up in groups so that students can work alongside each other

Success criteria set up with the learning intention stated clearly at the front of class on the board.

Teacher raises hand - praises students for responding correctly, i.e. they quietened.

Teacher runs through expectations to see if students are meeting the needs of the task.

Students responded with their own questions. A mix of responses from students to answer the questions or to elaborate on the query further.

Students set to task. Teacher moved around the room and responded to a number of questions. Most students choose to work/discuss with a classmate.

The class has a good “hum” to it.

After 20 minutes, the teacher checks back in with the students. A whole class discussion follows. Students listen to one another's responses. Seven different students offer a response.

These observations outlined in Table 3.4 added depth to the responses given to the researcher during the interviews and enabled the researcher to connect the conversations to actions.

Observations during each case study included an assembly, a school tour (one at each site of Northern College), a staff meeting and classroom observations.

3.8 Documents

To increase the validity of the data gathered, school documents were utilised as a further source of evidence. This method helped to contextualise the data and to ensure its accuracy, when collected from the interviews and observations. These secondary sources included school development plans, annual reports, newsletters, yearbooks, minutes of meetings and media coverage, enabling the researcher to make connections between what was stated in the interviews, and what was observed in the school documents.

3.9 Triangulation/Trustworthiness

The practice of triangulation is to support the events and facts of the study with multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009; Richards, 2005; Thomas, 2016). Yin (2009, p.114) describes a great strength of the case study approach is the "opportunity to use many different sources of evidence". Flick (2014, p.184) recognises that by using more than one source of data "increases scope, depth, and consistency in methodological proceedings and thus puts findings on a more solid foundation". Berg (2009, p. 5) believes that researchers gain a deeper understanding of the participants' reality by combining what he describes as "several lines of sight". This term plays on the original meaning of triangulation, whereby "three known points or objects are used to draw sighting lines toward an unknown point" (Berg, 2009, p. 5). It is expected that these points will intersect and confirm spoken words with actions and written words. In other words, triangulation will increase the level of trustworthiness of the data being collected. In this study, triangulation was used in the form of interviews, observations and school documents.

3.10 Access to sites

Research in Victorian government schools requires approval from the Department of Education and Training (DET) before it can proceed. An application form was submitted to the DET, which was approved (see ethics procedure later in this chapter for more detail). Following approval

to conduct research in government schools, school principals were approached to consider research taking place in their schools. The initial contact with the principal was via email, followed by a visit to the school to formally introduce the research idea and requirements of the school if the research proceeded. Communication between the researcher and school continued following this visit to confirm dates, times and resources (room to interview, interview participants, observations, tours, gathering of documents etc). This follow up communication was liaised with the personal assistant to the principal at Northern College and continued directly with the principal at East Meadows College.

3.11 Data Analysis

An inordinate amount of data was collected over the duration of each school visit, requiring constant analysis, rather than waiting until all was gathered. This was the case outlined by Day et al. (2000), who highlighted the need to start analysing the data early on in the study and to proceed concurrently with the on-going collection of data in schools. Day et al. (2000, p.34) noted that such an approach meant the analysis and collection of data became "closely integrated to the extent they began to inform each other". An inductive approach was used to refine the data, make connections between data and develop more general concepts. Such an approach complements the grounded theory upon which this thesis is based.

The ISSPP recommend following a series of steps to ensure a rigorous analysis of the data takes place. This process includes;

1. Interview Transcription
2. Analysis of Data
3. Analysis of the interviews
4. Analysis of other interviews
5. Using the Framework, draft the case study report, including the structure of the school contextual report. (Day, 2014).

3.11.1 Interview Transcription

As each of the interviews were audio recorded, they were then transcribed to enable complete analysis of what was discussed and allow for themes to be identified. The individual interviews were transcribed word for word and returned to the participant to review and seek clarification on anything discussed. Participants were advised that they had the opportunity to remove or change any part of the transcript should they feel that was necessary. No participants requested changes to be made to their transcriptions. The group interviews were transcribed as

summaries of the discussions that took place. This reduced the time it took for transcription without overlooking the themes that were discussed. On average, each individual transcriptions was approximately 6,000 words, whereas, each group interview was approximately 3,300 words.

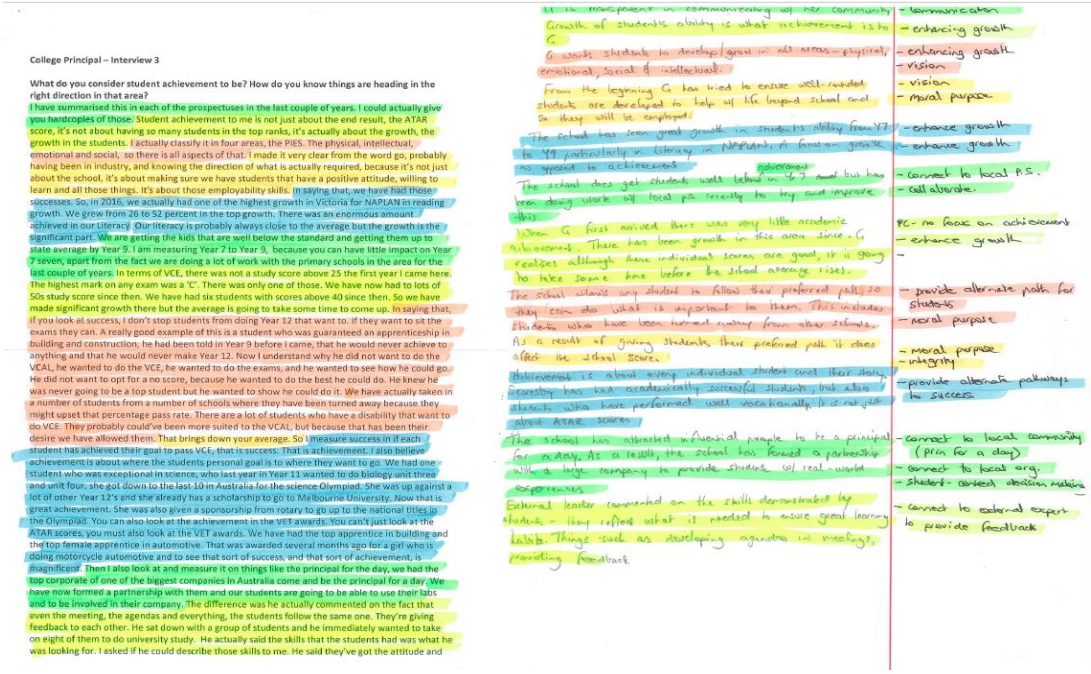
3.11.2 Analysis of Data

An inductive process of analysing the interview data gathered from each school was used. As Creswell (2014, p. 65) explains, an inductive process requires the researcher to build "from the data to broad themes to a generalized model or theory". This inductive process complements a strategy described by Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 21) as 'data reduction'. Data reduction is the "process of selecting, focusing simplifying, abstracting and transforming the "raw" data that appear in written-up field notes" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21).

The first stage of data analysis took place during the gathering of data for the studies. By reviewing the data that was being collected while still having easy access to the site and the participants, it enabled the researcher to think about what data had already been collected and whether there was more or better quality data required (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Day, 2014). By way of example, the value of this part of the process was evident during one of the case studies whereby the researcher on review and reflection of the principal's first two interviews had not fully addressed the issue of growth in student achievement data. As a result, this became the focus for the third interview with the principal. Another example of the value of reviewing data while still having access to the site and participants includes an observation made at Northern College. The researcher observed the practice of a staff member announcing "time counts" to students as they entered the building at the beginning of the day. On raising this observation with the principal, he provided a detailed insight into why this practice was used and the purpose of it. This was a key practice in Northern College's approach to attendance and may not have been discussed had this observation not taken place and the follow up question presented to the principal.

The second part of the data analysis process followed the transcribing of interviews. Figure 3.2 illustrates how the researcher used "first-level coding", which Miles and Huberman (1994, p.69) describe as a way of "summarising segments of data". The researcher summarised one sentence to a paragraph of writing, to contextualise the information in a more manageable way. These segments were colour-coded to ensure the summary could be easily connected to the 'raw' text. Once the data was in a summarised form, pattern coding began. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p.69) pattern coding is "a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller

number of sets, themes, or constructs". Miles and Huberman (1994, p.69) believe pattern coding has four important functions;



College Principal – Interview 3

What do you consider student achievement to be? How do you know things are heading in the right direction in that area?

I have summarised this in each of the prospectuses in the last couple of years. I could actually give you hardcopies of those. Student achievement to me is not just about the end result, the ATAR score, it's not about having so many students in the top ranks, it's actually about the growth, the growth in the students. I actually classify it in four areas, the PIES. The physical, intellectual, emotional and social, so there is all aspects of that. I made it very clear from the word go, probably having been in industry, and knowing the direction of what is actually required, because it's not just about the school, it's about making sure we have students that have a positive attitude, willing to learn and all those things. It's about those employability skills. In saying that, we have had those successes. So, in 2016, we actually had one of the highest growth in Victoria for NAPLAN in reading growth. We grew from 26 to 52 percent in the top growth. There was an enormous amount achieved in our Literacy. Our literacy is probably always close to the average but the growth is the significant part. We are getting the kids that are well below the standard and getting them up to state average by Year 9. I am measuring Year 7 to Year 9, because you can have little impact on Year 7 seven, apart from the fact we are doing a lot of work with the primary schools in the area for the last couple of years. In terms of VCE, there was not a study score above 25 the first year I came here. The highest mark on any exam was a 'C'. There was only one of those. We have now had to lots of 50s study score since then. We have had six students with scores above 40 since then. So we have made significant growth there but the average is going to take some time to come up. In saying that, if you look at success, I don't stop students from doing Year 12 that want to. If they want to sit the exams they can. A really good example of this is a student who was guaranteed an apprenticeship in building and construction, he had been told in Year 9 before I came, that he would never achieve to anything and that he would never make Year 12. Now I understand why he did not want to do the VCAL, he wanted to do the VCE, he wanted to do the exams, and he wanted to see how he could go. He did not want to opt for a no score, because he wanted to do the best he could do. He knew he was never going to be a top student but he wanted to show he could do it. We have actually taken in a number of students from a number of schools where they have been turned away because they might upset that percentage pass rate. There are a lot of students who have a disability that want to do VCE. They probably could've been more suited to the VCAL, but because that has been their desire we have allowed them. That brings down your average. So I measure success in if each student has achieved their goal to pass VCE, that is success. That is achievement. I also believe achievement is about where the students personal goal is to where they want to go. We had one student who was exceptional in science, who last year in Year 11 wanted to do biology unit three and unit four, she got down to the last 10 in Australia for the science Olympiad. She was up against a lot of other Year 12's and she already has a scholarship to go to Melbourne University. Now that is great achievement. She was also given a sponsorship from rotary to go up to the national titles in the Olympiad. You can also look at the achievement in the VET awards. You can't just look at the ATAR scores, you must also look at the VET awards. We have had the top apprentice in building and the top female apprentice in automotive. That was awarded several months ago for a girl who is doing motorcycle automotive and to see that sort of success, and that sort of achievement, is magnificent. Then I also look at and measure it on things like the principal for the day, we had the top corporate of one of the biggest companies in Australia come and be the principal for a day. We have now formed a partnership with them and our students are going to be able to use their labs and to be involved in their company. The difference was he actually commented on the fact that even the meeting, the agendas and everything, the students follow the same one. They're giving feedback to each other. He sat down with a group of students and he immediately wanted to take on eight of them to do university study. He actually said the skills that the students had was what he was looking for. I asked if he could describe those skills to me. He said they've got the attitude and

Figure 3.2: Transcription and data analysis

- It reduces large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units.
- It gets the researcher into analysis during data collection, so that later data collection can be more focused.
- It helps the researcher build a cognitive map, an evolving schema for understanding what is happening locally.
- When several researchers are engaged in individual case study work, it lays the groundwork for cross-site analysis by surfacing common themes and causal processes.

Figure 3.3 demonstrates one example of how 'raw' data went through the process of first-level coding, followed by pattern coding.

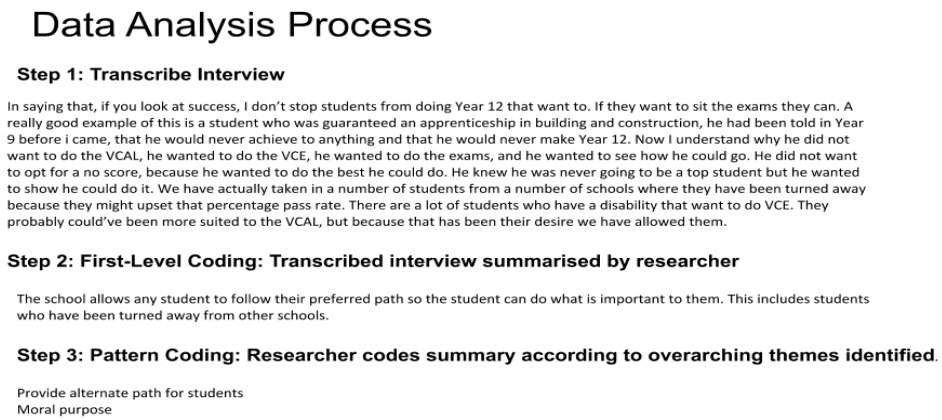


Figure 3.3: Process of identifying patterns and themes in data

Following this stage of the process, the researcher then began to look at the pattern codes that had been created and made decisions about the relationships between these codes, e.g. the code, "provide alternate paths for students", was drawn from a long statement made about the different opportunities the school provided each student. Over time, there were a number of examples of codes that could be placed under a larger theme of "creating an inclusive environment". This, along with other student-centred practices, merged to form Inclusive practices. This is in line with Bryman (2012, p. 568), who describes "coding in qualitative data analysis tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity". Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5 demonstrate how the coding of transcripts changed over time and how some codes were subsumed or merged with others to form a more general concept. The principal's characteristics remained quite stable with regard to how they were identified in Step 3 of the coding process.

Practices	College Principal	Assistant Principal	Curriculum Leader	Business Manager	Leadership Coach	School Council President	Leading Teachers -	Leading Teachers -	Leading Teachers -	Students - Year 8	Students - Year 11	Parents	
Orderly Enviror	38	18	11	15	4	9	21	1	8	3	0	0	128
Collaboration	70	25	20	21	7	11	25	3	17	3	0	2	204
Positive Culture	25	10	3	7	8	16	24	7	2	9	4	5	120
Network - conn	53	13	2	2	5	19	4	0	5	2	4	4	113
Quality Instruct	35	18	6	4	5	5	10	5	6	1	8	3	106
Vision	25	9	11	6	3	13	9	9	2	1	0	5	93
Building Staff	32	7	9	6	3	2	4	2	9	0	0	2	76
Enhance percej	10	10	2	14	8	14	4	1	4	3	2	3	75
Orderly Enviror	7	1	1	18	5	9	2	10	1	6	4	3	67
Change Manag	33		4	3	5	4	1	5	2	4		2	63
Focus on Growt	12	5	2	2	2		12	8	6	1			50
Inclusive	16	4	1	2	1	5		1	3	2	7	6	48
Student Centr	27	18	3	10	2	16	10	1	5	20	17	4	133
Guaranteed & \	13	5	7	1	2	2	7	5	3			3	48
Situational Leac	19	1	5	1	6	1		3	1			2	39
Supporting Doc	8	6	6	2	2		4	2	4	3	1	1	39
Budget Restrair	13	10		5		3		1				7	39
Staffing Turnov	9	3	3	2	2	3	2	1	1	6		3	35
Using Data to ir	12	3	6		4	2	2	2					31
Characteristics													
Communicator	14	11	5	11	9	13	11	9	10	10	6	13	122
High Expectatic	23	5		7	3		7	8	11	9	2	2	77
Moral Purpose	32	2		1		4	1	5	4	1	1	3	54
Strong leader	14	1		7	4	4	2	6	2	2		3	45
Committed	13	3		5	4	4	4	2	1	3	1	2	42
Innovative	12	4	3	8	1	2				1		2	33
Experienced	21		2			1	1	1					26
Resilient	16			1	6	1						1	25

Figure 3.4: Initial pattern coding of data

Practices	College Principal - P	Assistant Principal - AP	Curriculum Leader - CL	Business Manager - BM	Leadership Coach - LC	School Council President - SCP	Leading Teachers - LT1	Leading Teachers - LT2	Leading Teachers -	Students - Year 8	Students - Year 11	Parents - PR	
Inclusive/ Orde	50	23	5	30	8	16	12	12	9	28	28	13	234
Collaboration/	70	25	20	21	7	11	25	3	17	3	0	2	204
Vision/ Positive	50	19	14	13	11	29	33	16	4	8	4	10	211
Network - conn	63	23	4	16	13	33	8	1	9	5	6	7	188
Quality Instruct	56	29	19	7	9	7	21	12	13	4	9	7	193
Change Manag	33		4	3	5	4	1	5	2	4		2	63
Focus on Grow	12	5	2	2	2		12	8	6	1			50
Situational Lea	19	1	5	1	6	1		3	1			2	39
Budget Restrair	13	10		5		3		1				7	39
Staffing Turnov	9	3	3	2	2	3	2	1	1	6		3	35
Using Data to ir	12	3	6		4	2	2	2					31
Characteristics													
Communicator	14	11	5	11	9	13	11	9	10	10	6	13	122
High Expectatic	23	5		7	3		7	8	11	9	2	2	77
Resilient/ Stron	30	1		8	10	5	2	6	2	2		4	70
Moral Purpose	32	2		1		4	1	5	4	1	1	3	54
Committed	13	3		5	4	4	4	2	1	3	1	2	42
Innovative	12	4	3	8	1	2				1		2	33
Experienced	21		2			1	1		1				26

Figure 3.5: General concepts created from merging codes

By following this process, the researcher was able to systematically consider the data and support conclusions to be drawn, by using the colour coded system to work backwards from the final themes to the raw data to support elaborations. This highlighted the richness of qualitative data and provided actual examples of how such a theme had been identified.

Through the process of analysis, the researcher drew on a number of tactics to generate meaning from the data. These tactics, taken from Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) included;

Counting - After summarising and reviewing the data, more specific themes were generated. Once these themes were identified throughout the data, they were collated to provide raw figures. This enabled the researcher to see the dominant themes easily, to verify the hypothesis and to ensure the data was not skewed by personal bias.

Noting Patterns, Themes – As previously mentioned, the practice of pattern coding enabled the researcher to identify patterns and themes throughout the analysis to manage the amount of data that was drawn from each site.

Seeing Plausability - Whilst reviewing and reflecting on the data during the analysis stage, there were some dominant themes that presented. However, it was important to reflect on both case studies before concluding on the practices and characteristics that were employed by principals in improving schools with a low educational advantage.

Clustering and Subsuming Particulars into the General - During the first-level and pattern coding stage of analysis, the researcher engaged in the clustering of practices under specific themes. More analysis of the particular practices or actions allowed the researcher to subsume these into more general concepts (see previous example of the concept of “inclusive practices” being formed). This process enabled the data to be more manageable and patterns to begin to form.

Each of these tactics played an important role in reaching conclusions regarding the data that was collated from the two sites. This process required the researcher to use their knowledge of the context, previous conversations with all participants and the understanding of the school's vision to make decisions about the most appropriate words to summarise what has been stated. This enabled the data to be better managed and form patterns in the information and from the observations.

The final themes for each case study help to frame the chapter on each school. See Chapter 4 for Northern College and Chapter 5 for East Meadows College.

3.11.3 Cross-case comparisons

Following the single site analysis, an investigation into the two cases was undertaken. This involved reviewing both cases and comparing and contrasting the themes that had been identified at each site. This cross-case comparison can be found in Chapter 6.

3.12 Ethics Procedures

The University of Melbourne clearly outlines the steps that are required to be taken for the research involved in this study to proceed. Careful consideration in obtaining informed consent, deception and confidentiality must be given for this research, as outlined by the practices and protocols created by the university. This research paper was approved by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education Human Ethics Advisory Group on December 19, 2014. The ethics identification number is 1441970.

For this particular study, a three step process is required to receive permission from the Department of Education to conduct research in a government school, in other words, obtain informed consent. This process, as outlined by the Performance and Evaluation division of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) (2013), includes;

1. Gaining approval from the Department of Education to approach school principals. Approval was granted on June 26, 2014, with approval number 2014_002337.
2. Gaining approval from the principal to conduct research in the school
3. Gaining consent of participants in the study, including the consent of the students (and where necessary their parents) and/or staff.

As part of the application to obtain informed consent to conduct research in government schools, the department requires detail about the study that includes "sufficient information

to enable a full understanding of the aims, methodology and procedures of the research" (DET, 2019, p. 6). Sufficient information includes such things as;

- a statement in plain language describing the research
- the proposed letter to parents, where appropriate, requesting approval for their students to participate in the research
- consent forms to be provided to all participants and, if necessary, parents
- all questionnaires, surveys and interview questions.

Obtaining informed consent to conduct research within government schools will help avoid the ethical issue of deception. Deception, as Bailey (2007, p.20) describes, is "when people are not told they are participating in a study, are misled about the purpose or details of the research, or are not aware of the correct identity or status of the researcher".

The issue of confidentiality was considered throughout this research with every step taken to ensure the identity of the schools involved remain unknown. There will be a great deal of data gathered from each school site. The primary data, from the interviews and observations, will be limited to certain personnel involved in the research. Hard copy documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure area, whereas, electronic material will be kept on a password protected computer. The primary data will be destroyed after five years. Secondary data gathered such as; school development plans, annual reports, newsletters, yearbooks, minutes of meetings and media coverage, will be made available to others through the ISSPP website. The identity of the schools will be removed from these secondary sources.

3.13 Delimitations

Delimitations outline the boundaries of the study to better understand what the drawn conclusions from this study can and cannot contribute to the broader subject of educational leadership. This is important to state to ensure the audience knows how conscious decisions have been made to target a specific aspect of educational leadership. Having an awareness of the target of this study will support the decision making about the appropriateness of applying what is found in this study to other settings.

The delimitation of this study is that it is bounded within the cases of two principals in improving, low advantage schools in metropolitan areas of Melbourne, Australia. The use of phenomenology as opposed to ethnography reflected the time of five days spent in each school to make observations. The limited amount of time spent observing could not justify using ethnography; however, the "essence and underlying structure of the phenomenon", will be

gained through the interviews and observations made during these case studies (Merriam, 2009, p.23). This will help understand “the interaction of individuals not just with others, but also with the culture of the society in which they live” (Merriam, 2009, p.23)

Whilst Baxter and Jack (2008) highlight that case study methodology limits the scope of this research to the specific schools of this research and the phenomenon of principal leadership, Yin (2009) provided clear reasoning for using this approach and these have been outlined in greater detail earlier in this chapter. The significant reasons for choosing a case study for this research are;

- As a passive bystander, the researcher will gain detailed observations of the behaviour of those involved in the study;
- The natural setting is relevant to the phenomenon under study; and
- The boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context.

This study provides detailed evidence from two schools about how context influences the leadership and performance of the schools involved. The multiple case study enables a cross-comparison and for generalisations to take place.

These results will add significant value to understanding how context influences school leadership and will contribute to a growing database of cases looking at this.

3.14 Limitations

The case study as an approach has its own weaknesses. According to Simons (2009) and Merriam (2009) these can include such issues as;

- Difficulty in processing the amount of data that has been accumulated and
- The reports generated from the findings can be too long and detailed.

Such limitations can be, and have been addressed in this study in a number of ways;

- This study consists of only two case studies. As such, the data accumulated will not be of the same amount as other qualitative studies
- A detailed overview of the data analysis process was provided in this methodology, outlining the way in which the data has been broken into identifiable themes.
- The findings have been presented by the researcher at three conferences at different stages of the accumulation of the data. As such, this has supported the review and refinement of themes. The conferences that have been presented at include;

    - Australian Council for Educational Leaders, Sydney, Australia, September 30 - October 2, 2015.
    - Australian Association for Research in Education, Melbourne, Australia, November 27 - 1 December, 2016.
    - The American Educational Research Association, Toronto, Canada, April 5 - April 9, 2019.
- There has been a dissemination of findings from this study in published journals and books that have already taken place. Rather than wait until the study is finalised, the findings have been used to support the following publications;
    - Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., Longmuir, F., & McCrohan, K. (2018). The Leadership Culture and Context Nexus: Lessons from the leadership of improving schools. International Studies in Educational Administration, 46(1), pp. 22-44.
    - Gurr, D., Drysdale, L., Longmuir, F., & McCrohan, K. (2018). Successful school leadership that is culturally sensitive but not context constrained, in Murakami, E., Gurr, D. and Notman, R. (Eds) (2019) Educational Leadership, Culture, and Success in High-Need Schools (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing), pp. 25-44.

Case studies have long been thought of as the "exploratory phase for using other social science methods" and that it may not be as rigorous as other inquiry approaches (Yin, 2014, p.5). Some question the external validity or generalisability of research that uses case studies (Simons, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Bryman, 2012; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). This case study provides an excellent insight into the important role a principal plays in the improvement process of any school, but particularly a school with limited educational advantage on an improvement journey. As such, there will be a great deal a reader of this thesis will connect to and ultimately draw from, to support their own educational journey. This study will form its own conclusions and recommendations moving forward; however, it also forms part of a longitudinal study into school leadership by the ISSPP. The ISSPP have created their own framework to ensure consistency in the research across groups and countries. These case studies will inform the community further about successful educational leadership.

The issue of research bias is pertinent to case studies because of the personal involvement of the researcher with the participants of the study (Simons, 2009). During the case study, relationships will form with the participants due to the fact that the researcher is present at all times to collect data. The researcher acknowledges the position they have in generating the

findings for this research and will aim to remain true to the process that has been outlined in this methodology chapter.

Using inductive reasoning to draw a conclusion comes with some limitations. Specific to this study, one could question the number of observations made are limited, and therefore do not support the triangulation of data (Walliman, 2011). The observations of both principals took place in a multiple of forums; assemblies, addressing a large number of staff and in small group discussions. In addition to this, observations were made around each school to enable the researcher a stronger understanding of a typical school day, the interactions between staff and students, as well as much time spent within the classes at each school. The researcher believes that there have been enough observations made for the interview data to be supported and conclusions to be made, as well as generalisations made.

It is hoped the acknowledgement of the limitations of this study in this section are outweighed by the rigorous process undertaken, which has been described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY A – NORTHERN COLLEGE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will share the results from the analysis of data; interviews, school documentation and observations gathered from Northern College. The analysis was undertaken to identify, from multiple perspectives, the practices and characteristics of Northern College's principal that have contributed to the school's performance.

To understand the context within which these practices and characteristics have been observed and detailed, this chapter will address the following;

- Overview of the Principal's history as an educator
- The School's profile and context including;
    - Physical environment
    - Enrolments and attendance
    - Governance
    - School context
    - School vision
    - Structure of leadership at Northern College
- Principal Study
    - Principal practices
    - Principal characteristics
- Contribution of others in the success of the school

To gather information around school leadership and school context and the influence of these on school performance, a variety of school community members were interviewed.

Those interviewed are listed in Table 4.1 below.

To protect the identity of the Principal studied in this chapter, he is referred to by the pseudonym of Peter.

Table 4.1: Participants interviewed as part of the research study

Participant Category	Abbreviation	Number of participants	Number of interviews
College Principal	P	1	3
Campus Principal 1	CP1	1	1
Campus Principal 2	CP2	1	1
Assistant Principal 1	AP1	1	1
Assistant Principal 2	AP2	1	1
School Council President	SCP	1	1
School Council Vice President	SCVP	1	1
Leading Teachers 1	LT1	3	1
Leading Teachers 2	LT2	3	1
Leading Teachers 3	LT3	2	1
Parents	PR	2	1
Students 1	S1	5	1
Students 2	S2	4	1
Education Support Staff	ESS	4	1

4.2 Principal History

Peter grew up in the northern suburbs of Melbourne where the level of social disadvantage was apparent. Unlike many of his peers, Peter was one of few who completed his secondary education. Throughout his education, Peter watched many students leave school for unskilled jobs in the local area as opposed to gaining secondary qualifications. Such an experience left Peter feeling despondent about the opportunities for all in education and was one of the major driving forces that influenced his decision to become an educator. As he embarked on his career, Peter was inspired to achieve and develop a strong moral purpose for education.

Following Teachers' College, Peter taught for a period of time in country Victoria. With this experience, he returned to Melbourne with an opportunity to gain a teaching role in a number of schools. He chose to teach in a school located in the southern area of Melbourne, identified as having a low educational advantage. This was the first school where Peter realised the difference he could make to the educational opportunities for all students by being a driving force in the turnaround of this school's success. This turnaround was measured by the increase in student enrolment and the improvement of student achievement. Peter then moved to a school in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne. As principal of this school, he moved the median study score for Year 12 students from below state average to being ranked in the top ten government schools in Victoria. Tragically during this time, the school experienced a serious fire, which resulted in extensive damage and a rebuild. Peter's ability to make such an impact

on the growth of student academic success along with the re birth of school buildings and grounds, saw him identified as an ideal candidate to be the first Executive Principal employed in the state of Victoria. This appointment was made at Northern College in 2008.

Peter identified that his career as an educator has been highlighted by opportunities to challenge himself. He considers himself as someone who approaches school leadership in a matter-of-fact manner. He assesses what needs to be done and commits to making this change within a timeframe. Reflective of his deep moral purpose and drive, Peter believes that projected change being sought as a principal should be achieved within five to seven years. If this is not achieved in that timeframe, then the opportunity to make change has passed.

4.3 School Profile

4.3.1 Physical Environment

Northern College was established in 2007, born due to the amalgamation of three struggling neighbouring schools. Northern College, a co-educational school, is located approximately 18 kilometres north of the City of Melbourne. It is comprised of three campuses; Two Year 7-9 campuses located on separate sites, both sharing its grounds with a local primary school and a Year 10-12 campus. One of the Year 7-9 campuses houses an English Language Centre for community members. This centre supports the high percentage of students who attend Northern College with a non-English speaking background (NESB), which as of 2016 was 74% (https://www.myschool.edu.au/SchoolProfile/Index/113333/HumeCentralSecondaryCollege/50190/2016).

4.3.2 Enrolments

Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the enrolment numbers at Northern College over the course of Peter's tenure, from 2008 to 2015.

As shown in Figure 4.1, since opening in 2007, the student enrolment numbers of Northern College declined in 2009 before rising steadily until 2011 and then plateauing and declining slightly through to 2015.

According to the students, parents and teachers interviewed it was indeed made clear that such poor perceptions of the three schools prior to 2007 carried over to the birth of Northern College, resulting in families bypassing Northern College and seeking education elsewhere.

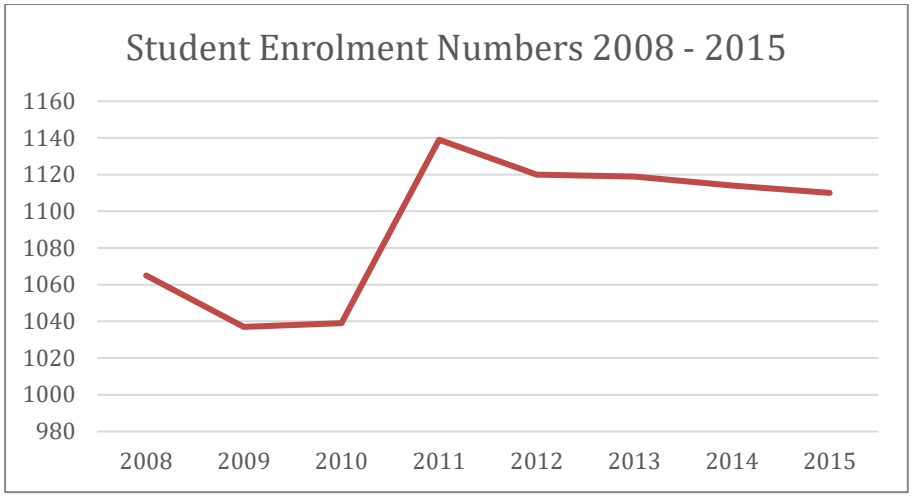


Figure 4.1: Student Enrolment Numbers at Northern College

N.b. The 2007 data was not attainable from the Department of Education.

Comments by the participants included;

> "In the past, there were a lot of dropouts and the school had a bad reputation" (PR)
>
> "A magic wand has been waved in the last 5 years. The atmosphere of the old school was that there was a lot of gangs and racism etc." (PR)
>
> "I had family friends who attended prior to the amalgamation, there was talk about a hostile environment" (S2).

Despite the rejuvenation of the three schools to become Northern College, the reputation of the suburb continued to haunt the new secondary school. Peter noted, with a level of exaggeration, that when he first observed the three schools as individual entities, "There was about 1,000 kids walking past these schools, the three most underperforming schools in the state". However, there was no exaggeration about the neglected facilities, the inability of the school to retain students until Year 12, or the low VCE results.

The reputation of Northern College began to change as some of the initiatives implemented by Peter started to be noticed by the community. The initiatives included; greater student accountability for attendance and the introduction of a new school uniform. Highlighted in the school's 2008 annual report was a commitment to new building works to be completed over the coming years. This is what would be most visible to prospective parents, an enticing draw card to help to rejuvenate enrolment numbers;

> "Larger more open learning spaces will replace the traditional classrooms and corridors. The new spaces are specially designed to enable learning to happen in a

variety of ways. For example, some students can be reading quietly in one space while other students are working as a group on computers in another space. Quiet areas are designed so outside noise is kept to a minimum. The new spaces make plenty of use of natural light and ventilation, which ensures the best possible learning conditions." (Northern College, 2008, np)

4.3.3 Attendance

The attendance of the students at Northern College was perceived to be a major factor in school performance, with many of the staff referencing the attendance of some students being as low as 60%. Peter created a sense of urgency around attendance by highlighting to the staff that,

"If they are not here, they are not going to learn" (CP1).

This was recalled by a group of leading teachers who identified Peter's push to improve attendance by alarming staff with the following anecdote;

"Attendance was on 50 or 60 per cent (for some students). He used to say there was a student in Year 10 who, when it all got down to it, they had only done two years of high school. He was shocked with the fact that this was allowed to happen" (LT3).

Peter began the process of changing this example of underperformance through the use of data to inform staff. As well as referring to data to support staff, he provided a clear vision for all teachers to work towards through modelling what he expected to happen. These strategies will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Peter sought the support of the Department of Education and Training (DET) to ensure he could develop a policy of minimum attendance, adhering to the guidelines that it is the responsibility of the school to overcome high levels of absenteeism by promoting student engagement. This initiative was supported for 12 months by the DET, as it is considered, "exceptional circumstances" for a student not to be promoted to the next year level with their peer group. It is also deemed the responsibility of a school to overcome high levels of absenteeism by promoting student engagement (DET, 2017).

As a result of the DET's support, Northern College created a 'Satisfactory Completion Policy' which enacted a minimal 90 per cent attendance requirement for students to be promoted to the next year level. After implementing this in its first year, a clear message was sent to the community regarding the expectations placed on students and families for each child to attend

school on a regular basis. Peter unsuccessfully requested support from the DET for a second year and, as a result, included the following statement in the policy;

> "If a student has greater than 10% unapproved absences then the student/Team Coordinator/Leader and Campus Principal will liaise with the parent/guardian in order to agree on the appropriate pathway for the student" (Northern College, 2014, np)

As well as providing a clear message to the community, the policy provided staff with a consistent process to respond to unexplained absences. The implementation of attendance requirements created a foundation on which the school's changing context of higher expectations could be built.

4.3.4 Governance of School

As a government school, Northern College aligns with the DET's school governance guidelines outlined in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (DET, 2017). Northern College's governance began with the amalgamation of the three councils from each of the former schools. As a result, the council was very large in number and Peter felt decision making was difficult. According to Peter, he was initially confronted with a hostile school council, which he described in his own words;

> "It (School Council) was made up of three schools. It was huge. It was all the people that hated each other, three schools against one another. I had to disband that. I had one meeting and I am not very good at umpiring. It was a bloody fight" (P1).

Initially, Peter felt that Northern College's School Council was not meeting the objectives as outlined in the Education and Training Reform Act (2006, p. 34). These objectives are to;

- Assist in the efficient governance of the school
- Ensure that its decisions affecting students of the school are made having regard, as a primary consideration, to the best interests of the students
- Enhance the educational opportunities of the students of the school
- Ensure the school and the council comply with any requirements of the Act, the regulations, a Ministerial Order or a direction, guideline or policy issued under the Act.

Following these initial difficulties with the amalgamation of the councils from each of the three previous schools, Peter rebuilt a school council that would support decisions that were in the best interest of the school and its students.

Working closely with his school council, Peter communicated clearly with its members, ensuring they had a clear understanding of what was happening in the school and where he wanted the school to go;

> "You can't ask those parents to support your vision and direction if they do not know what is happening in the school" (P1).

This level of transparency ensured Northern College could continue its improvement journey with a high level of autonomy and flexibility under Peter's principalship. Peter also sought guidance from his regional DET director to support decisions that were integral to the successful foundation of the school. These included decisions such as extending the contracts of key staff that were on loan from other schools and to introduce a minimum attendance expectation for students to make them more accountable. Peter had great experience working within the DET, and this familiarity with the system was essential in understanding when he required the regional director's support and when he could utilise his autonomy available within a Victorian government school.

4.4 School Context

4.4.1 Level of Advantage

The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), is used by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to measure the educational advantage of the students attending a school. This index is discussed in greater detail in the Methodology section of this thesis. In 2016, Northern College's ICSEA was 886. Given the median for Australian schools is set at 1000 (ACARA, n.d.), this number places Northern College in the lower 16 per cent of all schools in Australia for educational advantage and confirms the students that attend Northern College are at a significant educational disadvantage due to student and school factors. This very low level of educational advantage is magnified when reviewing the distribution of students in accordance to their educational advantage;

- 73 per cent of students attending Northern College are in the bottom quartile of students relative to all students across Australia.
- 91 per cent of the students are placed in the bottom 50 per cent of students across Australia according to their level of educational advantage (ACARA, 2017).

According to the local council's community profile created from the 2011 and 2016 census (Hume City, 2017), the school's educational advantage is reflected through the statistics gathered from the wider community.

4.4.2 Families and Employment

Table 4.2 provides a snapshot of key demographic features of the area surrounding Northern College and how this compares to the greater Melbourne area.

Table 4.2: Key Demographic Features of Northern College Community versus Greater Melbourne Area from 2011 Census

	Area Surrounding Northern College (%)	**Greater Melbourne Area (%)**
Single parent families	17.5	10.4
Unemployment	16.1	5.5

The information in Table 4.2 highlights that the percentage of single parent families is almost double, and the unemployment rate is almost 3 times compared to that of the greater Melbourne area. Such statistics emphasise the generational poverty and hardship experienced by families in the area surrounding Northern College.

The ethnic diversity of the local area supports the high percentage of students with language backgrounds other than English. Table 4.3 highlights the percentage of the population who identify themselves with a particular ancestry group and how this compares with the greater Melbourne area. "Ancestry is a good measure of the total size of cultural groups" within a given area (Hume City, 2017). The table also includes the change from the census taken in 2006 to provide a snapshot of how the community has evolved over time.

Table 4.3: Percentage of people that are connected to a particular ancestry group in the Northern College Community versus Greater Melbourne Area from 2016 Census and how this has changed since 2006

Ancestry	Area Surrounding Northern College (%)	Greater Melbourne Area (%)	% Change since 2006 for area surrounding Northern College
Australian	20.6	24.0	-5.8
English	19.3	26.6	-0.4
Lebanese	4.6	1.0	+1.0
Turkish	7.2	0.8	-0.5
Assyrian/Chaldean	5.2	0.3	+3.0
Iraqi	3.0	1.3	+1.2
Syrian	0.6	0.1	+0.3

Table 4.3 suggests that in comparison to the greater Melbourne area, the demographic that would feed into Northern College have a smaller percentage of people that consider themselves of AngloSaxon ancestry. Whereas, there are considerable larger populations of people

connected to Lebanese, Turkish, Assyrian/Chaldean, Iraqi and Syrian ancestry in the Northern College community when compared to the greater Melbourne area.

These ancestral connections are also reflected in the local area's community profile of those who speak a language other than English at home. Table 4.4 highlights the large increase in Arabic and Assyrian/Aramaic being spoken at homes in the community local to Northern College and the vast difference in percentage of homes that speak these languages compared to the greater Melbourne area. Along with this information, the community profile also indicates there has been a large drop in percentage of homes that speak English only. In 2006, 58 per cent of people spoke English only and in 2016, 49 per cent of the local community spoke English only. There are more people in the surrounding area of Northern College that speak another language, as well as, or instead of English, than speak English only.

Table 4.4: Percentage of people who speak a Language other than English at home in the Northern College community compared to the Greater Melbourne Area

Language spoken at Home	**Area Surrounding Northern College (%)**	**Greater Melbourne Area (%)**	**% Change since 2006 for area surrounding Northern College**
Arabic	8.3	1.7	+ 2.1
Assyrian/Aramaic	6.0	0.3	+ 2.6
Turkish	6.8	0.7	-1.1

When describing the demographic of the school community, the interview subjects used descriptions such as, "high levels of students come from a refugee background", "lots of new arrivals and EAL (English as an additional language) kids", "extreme refugees with significant language and social issues". Such quotes highlighting the myriad of challenges the students of Northern College face when learning in a setting where English is the language of instruction.

4.4.3 Education Qualifications

Table 4.5 identifies the education qualifications of the local area to provide a further insight into the community surrounding Northern College.

These statistics demonstrate that the level of advantage at Northern College is mirrored in the greater community from which it draws it students. However, it also indicates a sharp rise in the number of students holding a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, as well as a rise in tertiary qualifications and decrease in the number of people who hold no qualifications at all since 2006.

These formal statistics of low educational advantage can be supported by anecdotal evidence compiled over the course of the interview process with many of the subjects referring to the disadvantage experienced by the students attending Northern College. The context of the area was referenced to in a number of ways such as, “low socioeconomic”, “generational poverty”, and families experiencing “chronic welfare issues”.

Table 4.5: Highest qualification achieved in the community surrounding Northern College compared to Greater Melbourne area.

Highest Qualification Achieved	Area Surrounding Northern College (%)	Greater Melbourne Area (%)	% Change since 2006 for area surrounding Northern College
Year 12 or equivalent qualification	50.0	59.4	+12.3
Bachelor or higher degree	11.1	23.6	+2.8
Do not hold any qualifications	53.7	42.4	-3.5

4.4.4 Staff Retention and Recruitment

Over the course of Peter’s tenure of 7 years there was a large turnover of staff. The trend was highlighted by the School Council President in the first annual report under Peter’s principalship;

> “He brings a wealth of experience with him and set about reorganising the set up and staffing of our College into 3 campuses” (2008 Annual Report)

This statement was followed by the statistic that over the 12 month period, 78 per cent of staff had been retained, which was significantly below the state average of 87 per cent. Given the staff numbers were well in excess of 100, it is clear the turnover of staff was significant from the very beginning. This turnover was highlighted by comments throughout the interview process;

> “If you look at the leadership team at the moment, probably half to 3 quarters of them are imports” (P1).

There were clear reasons why there needed to be such significant turnover. In some cases, staff made the decision to leave; however, there were significant performance issues.

> “I think I said that teachers didn't care, they wouldn't look after the place. That was reflective of what they felt about working there, what they felt about the students,

> what they felt about their teacher capacity to make an impact. It is quite the opposite now. Even the staff themselves, there is only a handful here from the beginning. I think there were people that couldn't cope and they went to another school. I think that is why we have such a change of staff but I think it was necessary" (AP2)

As a result of the turnover, and the influx of teachers whose pedagogies and/or philosophies align with the vision and values of the school, seeking a position at Northern College has become more competitive. At the beginning of Peter's tenure, it was difficult to offer a breadth of subjects for students because of the lack of interest for available positions at the school. Whereas now, there is strong interest in all positions advertised, resulting in a competitive recruiting process.

A member of the Principal Leadership team highlighted the change for the school;

> "When I first started psychology there wasn't any psychology teacher. I was a fresh graduate just starting up a Year 12 psychology program. That in itself is something that I did not have the skill or capacity to do" (AP2)

This participant continued by noting;

> "I am on the panel for a number of interviews now and there are 40 or 50 applicants for one job. Back then we would be struggling to get, in my case a first-year graduate. Whereas now, we have a pick from a larger crop" (AP2).

4.5 School Vision

The school vision is prefaced by the statement, "Two years of learning in one for all students". This statement was born out of the dire situation many of its students faced when they entered Northern College in Year 7. Anecdotal evidence from staff suggested that a large number of students began their high school education at least two years behind the expected literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Therefore, to 'catch them up' these students required two years of learning in one to reach the expectation of a student completing secondary school.

> "You got to look at the bottom line and half the kids in Year 7 have got Year 3 and 4 Literacy and if we do not catch them up they will end up not getting to Year 12" (P1).

The reality of this situation can be seen in the schools Year 7 NAPLAN data (Table 4.6). As this assessment takes place in May, the Year 7 students performance provide an insight into how far behind they were when they began their secondary schooling at Northern College. The

students would have only experienced approximately 13 weeks of school at Northern College, before undertaking the NAPLAN tests and therefore such data, provides a clear indication of student achievement levels at the end of their primary school education.

Table 4.6 highlights that in all cases, except for Writing achievement in 2012, the students in Year 7 at Northern College were below or substantially below the achievement level of students from all other schools in Australia. There are also many examples of the students performing below students from schools with a similar level of educational advantage; Reading in 2012 and 2014, Spelling in 2015, Grammar and punctuation in 2012, 2014 and 2015, and Numeracy in 2012 and 2014.

There is a consistent pattern in this data that helped shape the vision for the school and led to the development of the mantra, 'Two years of learning in one for all students'.

Over time, the school recruited staff who were aware of the dire situation of their students but were driven by the challenge that this presented;

> "I wasn't party to the development of the 2 in 1 mantra of the College but I think that says to me the students that we get come in with disadvantage but we shouldn't look at that, we should look at where they can go and how can we, in Peter's words, "catch them up". And what sort of ways we can work on bringing them to the level they could/should be at, given the fact they have had disrupted learning and things that have stopped them learning for where they should be at but recognising they have got the potential to get there anyway" (AP1).

The school's vision and subsequent teacher recruitment acknowledges that success in secondary schooling goes beyond academic achievement and aims "to develop and encourage in our students a love of lifelong learning while equipping them with the skills, qualifications and personal attributes they need for a purposeful and fulfilling life beyond school" (Northern College, 2015, np). This statement reflects the deep moral purpose that was evident not only in Peter but in many of the staff interviewed. Teachers were clear on the vision to "improve their students' life outcomes" (AP2). They knew that by aligning to this vision they were "aiming to ensure students do something meaningful in their life" (CP1) and this was demonstrated through their "commitment to the kids and their success" (CP1). This vision is also reiterated throughout the school's newsletter with statements such as, "As a School, our focus is on providing more opportunity for all our students to successfully complete Year 12" and, **"**The opportunities for success and improved life chances for our students are greatly enhanced if students complete Year 12" (Northern College, 2015a, p.1).

Table 4.6: Year 7 NAPLAN Results

		2008	2012	2013	2014	2015
Reading	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Writing	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Spelling	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Grammar and Punctuation	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Numeracy	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					

* *Nb: there are no data for the years 2009 to 2011.*

Well below average achievement level	Below average achievement level	At average achievement level	Above average achievement level

The school highlights its pursuit to develop the whole student in its 2014 Annual Report (Northern College, 2014, np) where it states;

> "Our school is focussed on improving the social and emotional skills of our students in recognition of the fact that these are essential for success in learning and life".

It is clear the school has a clear vision that is shared and communicated regularly amongst its community, including its students in Year 10-12, who stated during the group interview, "if you try hard enough, you will get where you want to go" (S2) and the Year 7-9 students were able to recite the vision and guiding principles of the school. These guiding principles of diversity, achievement and success reflect the community and what it values. Diversity recognises the backgrounds, cultures, aspirations and talents of the students and the need to provide rich learning opportunities for these students. Achievement identifies the responsibility of the school to ensure all students strive for and reach their personal best. Success highlights the

skills, knowledge and attributes students require to lead better lives beyond secondary education (Northern College, 2014).

The school demonstrates great commitment to its vision through the development of several key initiatives, which will be discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter.

4.6 School Performance

4.6.1 School Performance - NAPLAN

The performance of the school can be described by using data available from the MySchool website (www.myschool.com.au) and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) Post Compulsory Completion and Achievement Information (see: http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Pages/vce/statistics/schoolstats/index.aspx).

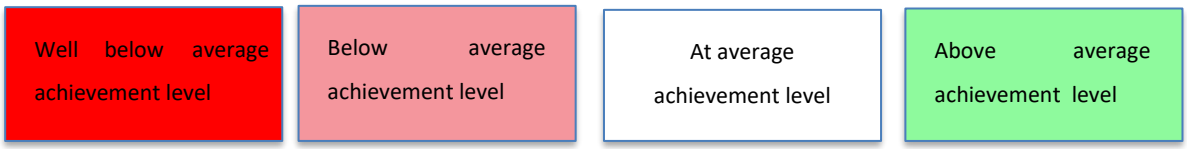
The MySchool website provides an overview of the school's performance in National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and is made up of the collection, analysis and reporting on an annual basis of student achievement in the area of reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy skills and knowledge (ACARA, 2013). For the purpose of this study, the Year 9 NAPLAN data will be used as most of the students would have been at the school for the previous 2 years and this will be the best indicator of the school's influence on student learning. It is important to note that due to the school's move from 3 separate schools to a multi campus College, NAPLAN data is not available from 2009 – 2011 on the public website.

The information in Table 4.7 highlights that students in Year 9 at Northern College have performed at, or below levels against all government schools in most areas of the testing at some time since 2008. The most significant and consistent deficits can be found around Reading, Grammar and Punctuation and Numeracy, whereby, the school has not only achieved substantially lower than all government schools every year but has also performed lower than schools with a similar educational advantage in at least one of the years in 2014 and 2015

Table 4.7: Year 9 NAPLAN Results

		2008	2012	2013	2014	2015
Reading	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Writing	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Spelling	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Grammar and Punctuation	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					
Numeracy	Similar School	N/A				
	All Schools					

**Nb: there are no data for the years 2009 to 2011.*



The school's performance in the area of Writing demonstrates a strong contrast to other areas of testing, despite still performing lower than all government schools during two of the last four years, its performance against schools of similar educational advantage has recorded two years of substantially above and one year above performances in the last four years. This performance in this learning area provides evidence that the schools investment in literacy coaches has been worthwhile. Since 2009, the College has invested in at least 13 literacy and numeracy coaches to support the teachers' capacity to develop the core skills of their students. This strategy will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The school's effort to achieve its mantra of 'Two years of learning in one for all students' can be illustrated when looking at the gains students took from Year 7 (2012) to Year 9 (2014), as highlighted in Figure 4.2

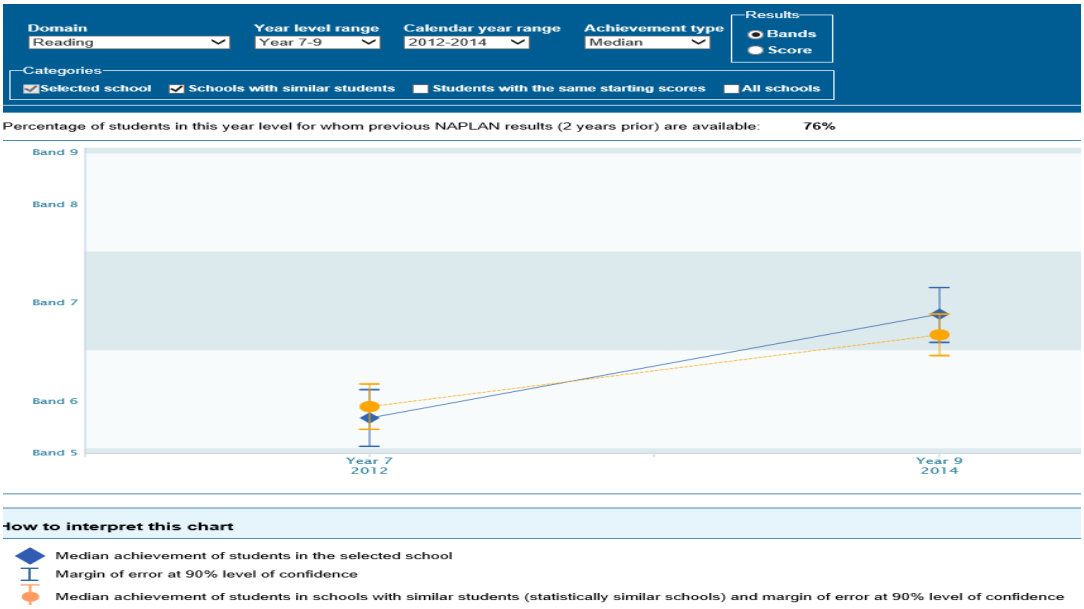


Figure 4.2: Reading gain of students from Year 7 (2012) to Year 9 (2014) compared to students of a similar educational advantage.

Figure 4.2 shows that the Reading achievement of Year 7 students from Northern College achieved a median below students from schools of similar educational advantage in 2012, whereas the same cohort of students had a median score greater than students from similar educational advantage schools two years later.

There were six NAPLAN Tests that were available to show the growth in students learning from Year 7 to Year 9 whilst under Peter's principalship. These were the Reading, Writing and Numeracy from each period, 2012 to 2014 and 2013 to 2015. Table 4.8 outlines how the gain in median achievement compared to schools with similar students.

From Table 4.8 it is evident that students are experiencing stronger growth in Reading compared to students at like schools. The growth in achievement in Numeracy and Writing is similar to those from schools with like students. There could be many reasons for the additional gain for students in reading but some possibilities could include the investment in literacy coaching or the more formal approach to collaborative practices amongst teachers in the form of Curriculum Design Teams, which has led to a range of actions including; developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum, greater use of data, creating common assessment tasks and moderating tasks to ensure a common approach to assessment. This, along with a daily 35-minute reading block for all Year 7-9 students were ways the school supported literacy skills and understandings for their students.

Table 4.8: Gain in median achievement compared to schools with students of a similar educational advantage.

Test/ Year	2012-2014	2013-2015
Reading	Gain above	Gain above
Writing	About the same gain	About the same gain
Numeracy	About the same gain	About the same gain

4.6.2 School Performance - Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)

The school's performance measure can also be highlighted by its Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) median study score. The VCE is one of the options available to high school students to formally recognise their completion of secondary school studies. The results are recorded in terms of study scores, which are marked from 0 to 50. The mean student score is 30.

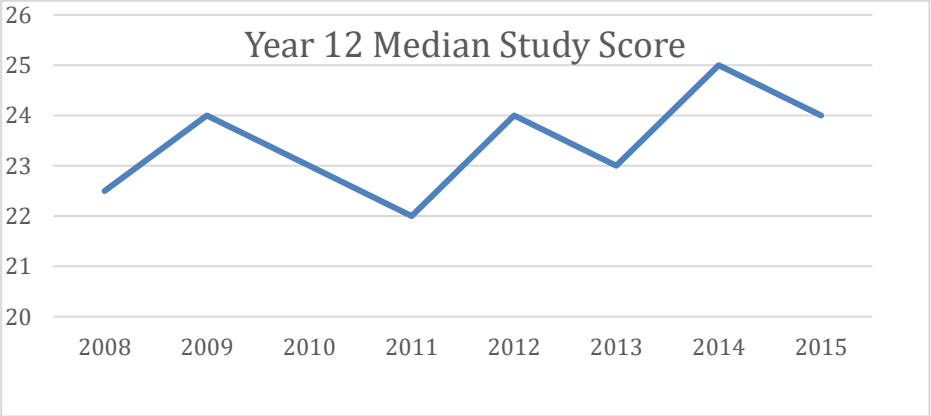


Figure 4.3: Year 12 Median Study Score achieved at Northern College

It is difficult to make conclusions based around the performance of the school given its short history as a multi-campus College. Overall, with reference to NAPLAN and the VCE median study score, the performance of the school would suggest it is on an improvement journey. The NAPLAN results are consistent, with some evidence of strategic practices having a positive effect on student outcomes, particularly in literacy. The VCE median study score suggests an upward trend, with a mean score of 24 in the last four years compared to a mean of less than 23 in the preceding three years.

Although the VCE median study score is evidence of student achievement, there is another more pertinent statistic that highlights the level to which the school achieves its vision of "developing and encouraging in their students a love of lifelong learning while equipping them with the skills, qualifications and personal attributes they need for a purposeful and fulfilling

life beyond school" (Northern College, 2015, np). This is the number of students that receive a tertiary offer. A tertiary offer recognises each student's successful completion of secondary school with an opportunity to continue learning at a tertiary institution or workplace.

According to Northern College's (2008, np) 2008 annual report, 63.4 per cent of students secured a tertiary place or an apprenticeship or traineeship. In contrast, the 2015 Annual report highlights that 98 per cent of Year 12 students were offered a tertiary or further learning position (Northern College, 2015, np). This is a significant improvement towards the school's goal of improving all students' life chances.

4.7 Structure of Leadership

From the very beginning of Peter's tenure at Northern College, it was clear an action to meet his vision for the school was to build and develop a strong leadership team. Not only was he looking for quality staff to form the nucleus of his team, but it was evident that there would be many positions of leadership made available to his staff. Peter was damning of the leadership team's commitment and skills when beginning his appointment at the school,

> "The leadership team didn't understand their role. They couldn't understand what they were supposed to be doing. They were just surviving from day to day. They didn't understand there were some professional standards to meet" (P1).

Peter quickly went through the process of redeveloping his team by placing all of those in leadership positions on notice for 12 months and advertising their positions so that they needed to reapply. Because of this process, about a quarter of the existing leadership team resigned from their roles, a large number of staff applied and there was a 50 per cent turnover in the leadership team.

As part of this restructure, highlighted in Figure 4.4, Peter introduced assistant principals at each campus. This redesign was as much symbolic as it was strategic. Peter noted,

> "I set very high expectations but to improve them (the leadership team) further, instead of having just a campus principal at each of the campuses, I decided to have an assistant principal as well with a half teacher allotment. Which meant I could bring the younger people I had imported into the fold and I could actually challenge the existing people" (P1).

Peter made it clear to staff applying for positions of leadership, that appointments would be merit based to ensure the successful candidate earnt the position and aligned their goals with that of the school.

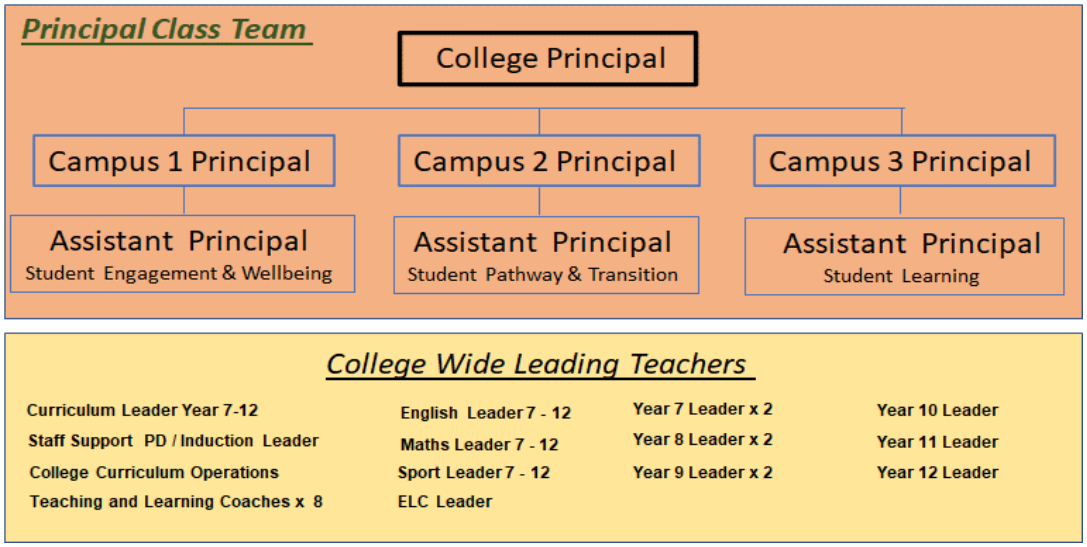


Figure 4.4: Leadership structure at Northern College.

4.7.1 Principal Class

In the first couple of years of Peter's tenure at the school, the Principal Class team grew from 5 to 7 members. This illustrated the Peter's strong belief that leadership makes a difference. A larger team enabled greater opportunities for collaboration, support and highlighted Peter's focus on building leadership capacity. Each Principal Class member was also given a priority area for the school that aligned with the strategic plan but was led by the Assistant Principal members of the team. As highlighted in Figure 4.4, the areas included, Student Learning, Student Engagement and Wellbeing and Student Transition/Pathways. This layer of responsibility was an opportunity for the Principal Class to develop initiatives to support the school's strategic plan and Peter's way of distributing the responsibility to achieve the goals amongst his leaders.

The Principal Class team met every week for two and a half hours, highlighting the value Peter placed on achieving success for the school and building the capacity of his leaders to address the school's needs.

4.7.2 Leading Teachers

As well as increasing the size of the Principal Class team, the number of teacher leadership positions grew to 26, which out of teaching staff of approximately 115, was a significant number. As a point of comparison, one of the teachers interviewed explained that she had

arrived from a school with a similar student population that had six leading teachers (AP1). It was evident throughout the interviews that the opportunities to lead were an attractive prospect for many staff with the right motivation, as was the professional development offered to build leadership capacity.

> "He has enabled people, if they have the drive, the capacity and the experience to step up to the leadership roles" (AP1)

> "I had some friends that came here the previous year and they told me the school is always looking at new initiatives. I could see my friends' leadership capacity improving. They seemed to be making good progress so I wanted to have the same opportunity." (LT2)

As well as the opportunities highlighted in Figure 4.4, the School had invested heavily in Teaching and Learning Coaches.

4.7.3 Coaching

Peter believed in coaching at all levels of staff and commenced with a focus on the Principal Class team. They were trained in coaching and these skills strengthened the rollout of change at Northern College over the following 7 years. The Coaching for Success, professional development undertaken by the school was delivered by an external agency. This professional development consisted of five sessions (four hours each) and provided staff with the ability to coach their colleagues to improve their practice. Such an investment of time and money highlighted the importance Peter placed on a distributed model of leadership influencing change in the school. An example of the importance of staff feeling empowered through the coaching professional development was highlighted by one of the Campus Principals;

> "So giving people that opportunity to understand what you are perceiving through their behaviours and supporting them to do something different and to show collegiality was pivotal. I wanted to do it. Coaching leadership, let's do it, let's action it. I felt really comfortable challenging people about their behaviours. The differentiation between making a positive contribution or supporting change but not dismantling other people and them feeling under attack was pivotal" (CP1)

The leadership team were quick to see the benefit of the skills they were gaining from the coaching professional development, which resulted in them leading with greater confidence, developing strong collaborative practices amongst the Principal Class team and teachers, and achieving actions outlined by the school's vision and direction;

"It may be the vision of one person, but it took a team to make it happen" (LT1)

Over the course of Peter's tenure, there were up to 13 Teaching and Learning coaching positions. More recently this number had been reduced to eight but the priority of these coaches remained on the core skills of Literacy and Numeracy. The primary role of these coaches was to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum and to build teachers' capacity to deliver this in the classroom. The coaches have been pivotal in developing collaborative practices amongst staff through data analysis, as well as creating common assessment tasks and building a shared understanding of what high quality student performance looks like through the practice of moderation.

4.8 Principal Practices

This section identifies the themes highlighted through the interviews to explain how Peter's practices as principal have influenced the culture and performance of the school and led to greater success.

Table 4.9: Number of interview comments attributed to themes of Principal practices

Theme	P	CP1	CP2	AP 1	AP 2	LT 1	LT2	LT3	SCP	SCVP	ESS	S1	S2	PR	Total
Balances Accountability with Support	98	25	31	15	44	22	12	9	17	9	10	8	4	7	312
Research Based Decision Making	45	8	13	10	18	4	5	9	8	1	2	2	1		126
Collaborative practices	38	12	14	7	9	11	4	5	11	4	3				118
Vision/Direction Setting	40	5	9	14	14	6	4	2	9	2	8	1		1	115
Builds Leadership Capacity	43	7	16	1	24	3	4	5			3				106
Developed positive mindset	11	9	7	19	7	3	2	2	6	2	7	2	3	3	83
Change Management	34	12	3	4	15	5	3	3	1		3				83
Demonstrated situational leadership	26	5	10	6	8		4	1	3						63

Peter's level of commitment and energy ensured his practices were implemented with a high level of planning and attention to detail. This section outlines what those practices were and how they were perceived and endorsed by the wider school community to support the transformation of the school. Table 4.9 identifies the strongest themes attained from the research process and the number of times those interviewed commented on the Principal demonstrating these practices. Each of these themes will be discussed in greater detail throughout the remainder of this section.

4.8.1 Balances Accountability with Support

What was apparent to Peter when he first arrived at Northern College was the lack of accountability staff, students and parents had for the achievement of the best possible educational outcomes. Over time, Peter brought in systems and policies that clearly outlined all school members' accountability but also highlighted the support that was available.

There was little accountability for staff to renew leadership positions, develop work programs, pedagogy and ensuring high quality pastoral care for the students. Peter quickly identified these as areas for improvement. Peter was very considered in his approach in asking his staff to be more accountable for their work and would always consider how the staff could be supported or developed to meet the new level of expectation.

These aspects of the school's structure, process and practice were identified by the participants in the interviews and these areas of accountability are addressed, along with the support offered by the school, using the sub-headings of Leadership Support and Accountability, Work Program Support and Accountability, Teaching Support and Accountability.

4.8.2 Leadership Support and Accountability

Prior to Peter's arrival, leadership positions were renewed without a process to ensure quality leadership and expectations. Within six months of his tenure at Northern College, Peter placed all members of the leadership team on notice that their positions would be advertised and that there was an expectation they be prepared to be professionally developed, align their philosophy with that of the schools and be prepared to work hard. This accountability was balanced with support of high quality professional development, regular leadership team meetings and being part of the team to develop the vision and direction. This support was recognised by others, as noted by one of the campus principals;

> "giving people that opportunity to understand what you are perceiving through their behaviours and supporting them to do something different and to show collegiality, for me was pivotal" (CP1)

Providing such support ensured the best opportunity to the leadership team to be successful in delivering their leadership role at the College. The support offered through professional development was pivotal in the change that was to take place at Northern College over the course of Peter's tenure.

4.8.2.1 Work Program Support and Accountability

Creating a guaranteed and viable curriculum was of paramount importance to Peter. The coherence of the curriculum program at the College was lacking when he arrived, as described by one of the campus principals;

> "Previously in Year 7, there were 10 different books being studied, how do you get moderation? At one campus in Year 10, they were studying Possum Magic. Possum Magic is something you would read to a pre-school kid" (CP1)

Using funding from national partnerships sought by Peter, he "quarantined" time within the teacher's teaching load so they could dedicate time to curriculum development.

> "There was a whole lot of time given to teachers to look at the different subject areas they were responsible for and Identify what was essential learning. They were given time release for this with funding that was at school to read and to identify what they had to do" (CP1)

This support was maintained throughout Peter's tenure as he continued to seek funding so that part of the teacher's load could be used for ongoing curriculum development, peer coaching and moderation. As a result of the time support provided, the College quickly developed a guaranteed and viable curriculum, with the positive outcome as described by one of the campus principals;

> "Now we are at the point where at the start of every term students get their assessment tasks and when they are due, Year 7s when they have their SACs, they get a menu of all the assessment tasks that are published to them and their parents. All the assessment tasks are common at Year 7 – 12. How it is delivered is up to the teacher but the content and the assessment tasks are uniform. All the kids have to pass them and they have to pass all the assessments to get an S for

that subject. If they get less than 50%, they have to re-sit those assessment tasks" (CP1)

Teachers were accountable to deliver a common curriculum and were involved in moderation sessions that ensure their assessment of the students were consistent in each learning area. The moderation of tasks, along with the responsibilities of teachers in assessing students' work, was included in the 'Satisfactory Completion Policy' for the school. The teachers were supported by the guaranteed and viable curriculum, along with policies that guided their practice and informed the whole community.

4.8.2.2 Teaching Support and Accountability

Once teachers had a guaranteed and viable curriculum, focus was placed on the delivery of the written curriculum. Peter was concerned with the lack of consistency in teachers' pedagogical practice.

> "One of the things I wanted was that teachers did not walk into their classrooms and shut the door and we do not know what they are doing in there" (P1)

There was consensus amongst the leadership team that a common approach to teaching was required. Peter sought a teaching approach that worked within the context of this school, i.e. students with low literacy and numeracy skills. The Explicit Instruction Model (EIM) approach was chosen using the research of Hattie (2008), a leading educational researcher who synthesised over 50,000 studies to identify the actions that provided the greatest impact for teachers and school leaders. EIM was first explored and practised by the College leadership team before it was shared more broadly with the teaching staff through a process of modelling and coaching. It did not take long for the staff to adopt this pedagogical style and a shared agreement was reached on how the curriculum was delivered.

Teachers at Northern College are now supported by the document, 'Northern College: Explicit Instructional Model For Leaders'. This document outlines the "essential elements" to be used by all teachers through five sections for every lesson; beginning of session, presentation, guided practice, independent practice and review.

Having a document that outlines how the curriculum at the school is delivered along with the ongoing support from the literacy and numeracy coaches was a key element of the success of this accountability measure;

> "the peer coaching has been a huge key strategy in supporting teachers in implementing that explicit instruction model. We have used that as the foundation

of the framework the teachers provide feedback for each other when they observe" (CP2)

Once the teachers had a guaranteed and viable curriculum, along with a stronger pedagogical understanding of how to deliver the content, it was important that they understood how effective their teaching was and identified the areas of weakness their students required support. To do this, Peter expected a level of teacher engagement with data generated from students' performance;

> "I want our focus to maintain on teaching and learning and make sure it is data driven and keep on their teaching and learning coaches, presenting the information, being accountable for what they said they would achieve, going back and testing those kids" (P3)

This expectation of data informed practice and was referenced throughout the interview process and was mentioned by teachers regarding;

- Attendance
- VCE achievement and student retention
- Moderation in all learning areas
- Staff and student surveys
- On Demand testing
- NAPLAN
- Literacy levels of students entering Year 7

This reference to data demonstrated that staff were very aware of the performance of the school and the areas that could be improved.

At the very beginning of Peter's tenure, when attendance of students was a priority and focus, staff were made accountable to ensure they knew the attendance rate of their students. This was pivotal to Peter's desire to ensure Northern College's students were given the best opportunity to learn and succeed.

> "There was no way, given the attendance that we had, that students were getting an effective education" (AP2)

To support the curriculum meetings that took place around data to inform practice, the College created a protocol titled, 'Questions for Leaders To Use When Facilitating CDT Meetings'. This document was a step by step process to support leaders to analyse data and develop goals for students based on this data.

Sharing the literacy and numeracy data of Year 7 students when they first arrived at the College was an important part of the process to make staff aware of the need for targeted practices to support their students. It also provided a context for the College's mantra of "Two years of learning in one". This was not an expectation but a goal, and using the DET's, 'On Demand' testing, became something all the staff were striving for.

Within learning areas, teachers were expected to be constantly engaging with assessment around their students' performance. This engagement ensured they were aware of what the student could do and where they needed to go next.

> "They are constantly pushing the kids to do stacks of writing and they are analysing it. They are basically grouping the kids. They have got a really explicit focus and they are actually working together to divide the kids up to ensure skill focused lessons in ability groups and then coming back and retesting and regrouping the kids" (CP2)

To ensure all teachers are using data and pushing their students to achieve, each teacher has a coach that helps review and further develop their goals. This review process is both a support and accountability measure for staff to demonstrate evidence of how well they have achieved their previously set goals and to devise strategies to reach the next goals with their students. This structure was an important initiative by Peter and his leadership team to help distribute the responsibility of building the capacity of staff to meet the needs of their students;

> "You want the review process to be developmental. You don't want the review process to be something you get to the end of and you fail. If you haven't seen them (the teachers) all year and you only have the goals they set at the start of the year and they get to the end of the year and they fail, that doesn't work. Now, two or three times a term a coach will go in and talk with the person" (P2)

Such a collaborative approach develops a culture of excellence amongst staff who are all aiming to reach the best outcomes for their students.

As a result of the engagement and transparency with data, students are also very aware of their performance, which has led to a shared responsibility between teachers and students of the achievement levels.

> "I have missed a bit of school this year but the teachers have supported me. The teachers try to lift you up and encourage you. When I have asked the teachers for extra work, they are very happy to do that" (S2)

This level of mutual respect and understanding of what is expected by everyone to achieve the best outcome and ensures the overall performance of the school has the best chance to improve.

4.8.2.3 Sustaining levels of Accountability and Support

This support is sustainable through a range of measures, but most notable is the coaching structures that have been put in place at the College. Assigning a coach to every staff member ensures quality is always being sought and the success is not dependent on a small selection of staff. The development of written policies such as, the Satisfactory Completion Policy and the Assessment Moderation Policy help to ensure the expectations are shared and sustained. These policies are referred to by mentors assigned to new teachers arriving at the College as part of their induction process. This mentoring structure is a key aspect of the sustainability of the success achieved at the College;

> "whether they are first year out or have been teaching for 25 years, there is a mentor that is allocated to them and it is a mentor they have for the year to support their transition. That mentor is there to be able to touch base with and identify the processes in place for certain procedures" (AP1)

Such a mentoring structure provides another avenue of support for new staff and helps address the accountability measures in place by the College. Such systems will mean school improvement can continue beyond the tenure of the current principal.

4.8.3 Research Based Decision Making

Peter's practice of research based decision making was one that had worked for him for many years prior to leading Northern College. Peter was comfortable to declare that he had, "never had an original idea in his life". This humble declaration reflected his commitment to evidence-based decision making and his primary focus was to instil this practice amongst his Principal Class team by regularly engaging with educational research;

> "He likes to pick a book or a professional reading on leadership to use with us and the leadership team and he will pull his big ideas from that. He does not just come in and say "hey, I've got this good idea"" (CP2).

Peter was very aware of Northern College's unique context and sought relevant research. He found a paper by Zbar, Kimber and Marshall (2008) entitled, "Schools That Achieve Extraordinary Success: How some disadvantaged Victorian Schools 'punch above their weight". This text identified four preconditions schools with social disadvantage required to achieve

excellent results. Using this text enabled Peter to highlight to his leadership team what was possible and to promote the catchphrase, “low socioeconomic does not mean low achievement” (Zbar et al., 2008).

Building the professional knowledge of staff to be more informed and understand the reasoning behind the decision-making was important. Such transparency enabled staff to own these decisions and support them more quickly than they would otherwise. One example of the effectiveness of this approach was the school’s introduction of the Explicit Instruction Model (EIM). The school had recognised there was not a consistent practice in the way teachers delivered content to their students and Peter believed that a consistent practice would support greater student achievement, especially within the context of this school. The process began with the Principal Class team understanding what it was and how it worked before adopting it as the most suitable pedagogical approach for their context. The team practised and peer coached each other. Following this, the Principal Class team took the practise of EIM to the learning leaders, which meant close to 40 staff were building their understanding and practice of the EIM. Other staff were then invited to trial this approach and fed back to the whole group on the result of using the method with their students. It was not long before the EIM could be embedded in the expectations of all staff at Northern College.

Peter truly believed that by informing decisions with research provided confidence for all community members in the vision outlined for the school. Research based decision making is “going to keep you directional and provide support and gives people who are a little bit doubtful of the direction or a bit unsure, it is going to give them something to read and understand. It is a theory and this is how it can work in practice. They can relate to the actual things that are happening at our school to the theory in the book” (P2).

This approach to all decision making continued and quickly embedded itself into the cultural being of the school, as identified by one of the campus principals;

> “In terms of the culture we still refer to the research a lot. In terms of everything we do we’re evidence based and I think staff understand that. They are very comfortable with doing professional reading and knowing that the rationale for everything that we do comes from evidence based. I think staff understand that now and don't question things so much because of that.” (CP2)

4.8.4 Collaborative Practices

The development of collaborative practices at Northern College took place at many levels. Peter believed wholeheartedly in the need for collaborative practices in a school that needed to turnaround its performance by building the capacity of its teachers;

> "…you have got to continue to develop ways for teachers to collaborate with one another. Collaboration between teachers is the most powerful form of learning" (P2).

The success of the implementation of collaborative practices at Northern College was built on the foundation of the 'Coaching for Success' professional development undertaken by the school's leaders. The peer coaching supported many aspects of collaboration across the College. However, to support authentic collaboration Peter had to seek support from experts beyond his school and district, as well as seek funding from external agencies to fund the school improvement journey.

4.8.4.1 Collaboration with External Agencies

The school improvement journey required numerous links to external experts and organisations to ensure a positive change took place at Northern College. Peter saw opportunities to engage with a number of leading university researchers in the area of school leadership and collaborated to support the transformation of the school's leadership team. This included the creation of the 'Emerging Leaders' program, in which staff in leadership positions or those seeking one, engage with researchers to develop their own understandings and skills to be strong educational leaders.

Brian Caldwell, a previous Dean of Education at The University of Melbourne and now an Educational Consultant, worked with Peter and his Principal Class team to establish a shared vision. Although the practice of developing this shared vision will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, this engagement highlights the importance Peter placed on the leadership team working collaboratively to develop a shared understanding.

Peter also volunteered to be part of a pilot program led by Vic Zbar, also an Educational Consultant, commissioned by the Northern Metropolitan Region DEECD (DET, 2009). This program enabled an expert in the area of educational leadership to review the structure and processes in place at the College and to share this more broadly for the learning of others. By working collaboratively with the department, Peter had evidence for his team to demonstrate

what a difference their work was having on the success of their school and to drive further change.

Connections with external agencies provided much needed funding for the school which was directed towards the school's priorities. The school sought funding from agencies such as Social Ventures Australia which offers funding, investment and advice to support schools in disadvantaged areas to help their students overcome their social barriers to success. The approach taken by the school to seek funding included being involved in ongoing projects, such as 'Growing Great Teachers' and developing their social and emotional curriculum to address the needs of students from a socially disadvantaged area. The money from such alliances was used to employ more literacy and numeracy coaches that supported staff to develop their teaching practices in this area.

Other collaborative partnerships with external organisations included a partnership with a local high performing and high social advantage school to improve the outcomes for their students. This partnership aims to bring together students from both schools to develop greater understanding of each other. For the students from Northern College it was an opportunity for them to realise they can achieve the same as anyone, as long as they were prepared to work hard. The success of this venture was particularly emphasised during an interview with a member of School Council;

> "They would go off to a private school and I remember last year the Year 12 students saying they did tests with the students from the private school and they bragged they beat them. That was like the ultimate ego for this school because the parents of the private school students pay big money for their kids to go there" (SCVP).

Northern College also saw opportunities for mutual benefit through a collaborative partnership with the local primary schools. Understanding that some students enter Year 7 two years behind expected reading levels, the school recognised they could make a difference if they offered opportunities for Year 9 students to read with Prep students at these local schools. Such a connection not only sought to enhance the reading skills of the future Northern College enrolments but it also built a sense of pride and community amongst its current students.

Peter was committed to providing the best education for the students at Northern College. By creating such links to external agencies, Peter aimed to enrich the lives of his teachers and students and enhance their learning opportunities.

The professional development from external agencies and experts, along with the funding, provided opportunities for Northern College to build the capacity of its leaders and enhance the collaborative practices of all its staff.

Collaborative practices were evident at Northern College in numerous ways, but were particularly pertinent to the turnaround of the school because:

- The Principal Class team met regularly to ensure they shared the vision and direction for the school and that the school's action plan and priorities were constantly reviewed.
- The leading teachers and teaching staff working developing and implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

This evidence of collaborative practices will be explored in greater detail using the insights gained from those interviewed.

4.8.4.2 Collaboration amongst Principal Class Team

It did not happen straight away, but over time the Principal Class team became very collaborative and helped drive the great amount of change that was happening across the College. The team would meet once a week for two and a half hours to discuss all school matters, but also spend time working within a smaller group focussing on the school's Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), which was the driving force underpinning the school's strategic plan. The smaller AIP groups worked together to drive change and manage the priority areas of Student Learning, Student Engagement and Wellbeing, and Student Pathways and Transition (see Figure 4.4).

One of the Campus Principals gave an insight into how decisions were made within the Principal Class team meetings highlighting the collaborative approach;

> "Whatever the issues presented were, whether, positive, negative, anything in between, they were the content of our discussions and we were grappling as a Principal Class not with the idea of what Peter expected us to do, but what were we going to do internally? What have you heard? What support is needed? How do we shift it? What are the issues? What were the blockers and how were people challenging what was going on? Knowing in the end that we wanted to commit to (better) student outcomes, was fantastic for me, and the work that we did as a leadership team was an integral part of what we wanted it to be" (CP1)

Peter saw the Principal Class team as the drivers of change. He built their capacity through developing and facilitating collaborative opportunities to ensure the school's vision could be

achieved. Over time, the members of this group began to own the change that was happening across the College and to realise the difference they were making and could continue to make;

> "The work that we did as a leadership team was an integral part of what was happening and what we wanted it to be" (CP1).

4.8.4.3 Teacher Collaboration

Peter highlighted the importance of teacher collaboration very early in the interviews stating,

> "I wanted people to be collaborative. I wanted people to benefit from collaboration, it is the best form of learning" (P1).

This belief was backed up by the vision of the school which highlighted Curriculum Design Teams (CDTs) as a core priority for its ongoing success (discussed further below in "Developing a Vision and Setting a Direction"). The purpose of the CDTs is for the teachers to work within their subject areas alongside the Curriculum leaders to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum. The guaranteed and viable curriculum was referred to in the 'Balances Accountability with Support' section; however, it is important to highlight the essential nature of collaboration to achieve a common curriculum across a multi-campus school, as well as common assessment tasks and moderation. Collaborative practices were also evident in the way the school used data to analyse student performance and create future learning experiences for the students.

4.8.5 Developing a Vision and Setting a Direction

The practice of developing a vision and setting a direction was important to Peter. This was amplified by the fact that Northern College was a multi campus school following the amalgamation of three failing schools Turnaround was dependent on each campus' understanding and embracing of the school's vision. The success of Peter's ability to deliver a clear message was evident throughout the interviews, as was its importance;

> "If you want to capture people you have got to have a reason and people need to understand that there is a way forward and I am providing it and there is a clear focus and you get them involved in the vision and direction and that is important" (P1)

Peter did well communicating the vision and its importance, as all interviewees made reference to the school's vision or the mantra of 'two years of learning in one'.

The school context was the greatest consideration for Peter when developing the vision with his Principal Class team. He understood the history of 'failure' that haunted the local community and that school expectations were low. Peter knew he needed to change this belief. Peter would seek research evidence to do this. The research paper cited earlier by Zbar et al. (2008) was shared with the Principal Class team and they were asked to study this paper and identify what was done by schools in similar contexts to Northern College. After much collaboration and discussion, using the expertise of people such as Brian Caldwell, the Principal Class team were individually filmed sharing what they believed the vision for the school should be. These were played back to them and compared with Peter's vision, which had also been recorded. Using these recordings, work continued on aligning the members of the Principal Class team to achieve a shared vision. This vision reflected not only the short term benefits but included the long term goal of improving the learning opportunities for the students at Northern College.

Once this vision had been developed, Peter made sure this was regularly communicated to staff along with the changes that the school needed to undergo to make this vision become a reality. Initially, he felt it was his responsibility to communicate this but, after time, it became apparent he could not maintain this role and that more responsibility should be distributed to the leadership group;

> "There were regular meetings with staff by me to explain where we were going in the direction and I did a lot of that. Towards the end of the second year, I started to rely on the leading teachers and Assistant Principals to do that for me and empowered those people to do that. I had to. I couldn't keep the pace going of being in front of staff and explain direction all of the time" (P2).

The regularity with which the vision was shared by the Principal was highlighted by the Assistant Principal who stated,

> "He would often bring us together. This was to ensure we kept our finger on the pulse; What are our targets? How are we travelling? What are our actions? Where are we at? How do we move to the next step?" (AP2)

The school's vision reflected Peter's deep moral purpose towards providing the students with the best possible secondary education that would lead to a more fulfilling life. This moral purpose was shared amongst the Northern College staff, and the teachers interviewed often referred to their moral purpose for education;

> "Over-arching is the purpose that you are here for the kids and to improve opportunities for them and their own self-worth and achievement is pivotal" (CP1).
>
> "If all of our kids complete Year 12 then their life chances will be so much better. That's the key thing. It's quite a simple vision really isn't it? But obviously it's quite complex in the implementation of it" (CP2).

The complexity of the change process undertaken by Northern College to achieve their vision can be seen in Figure 4.5. Over time, this vision was broken down to identify the structures, processes and strategies required in all areas of the school to achieve this vision. Through a collaborative approach, the leadership team developed a "road map", which was a visual representation of the school's vision and direction and enabled all staff to have another reference point to align their beliefs, attitude and practice. It was also a valuable reference point given the amount of change that was undertaken by Northern College over a short period of time.

The communication of the vision and direction of the school was of great importance to the school council. Peter prioritised this as an essential practice;

> "You can't ask those parents to support your vision and direction if they do not know what is happening in the school. We constantly do that. I have done that all my time" (P1).

To do this, Peter would invite key members of the leadership team to council meetings to share aspects of the school's practice that align to the vision and direction. It provided another voice that demonstrated the work that was happening at the school and garnered more support from the council moving forward. This approach was recognised by the Council members and appreciated;

> "I know when he wants to do something he will get his information and if he needs to bring people in to the committee and speak about the issue, he will do that if he thinks it will be good for the school. He's done that quite a few times when he has wanted something brought in. We will have a night and he will bring someone in to present to the committee, speak about it, we will talk about it and it is usually a yes" (SCVP)

When students were asked about the vision of the school, they identified the guiding principles of achievement, diversity and success. The students made different connections to these

principles based on their own exposure to them. The students recognised their meaning and the relevance they had in their school.

The practice of developing and communicating a vision and identifying a direction was clearly important at Northern College. Staff, parents and students were all able to communicate aspects of the school's practice that supported the vision. Staff were strongly connected to the vision and they felt committed to the role they could play in providing opportunities that could lead to students achieving better life outcomes.

4.8.6 Builds Leadership Capacity

One of the main drivers behind the leadership group undertaking the Coaching for Success program initially, was they had no experience or understanding in what it meant to lead. It was important they matured their understanding of leadership and began to develop a set of skills to support this. The Coaching for Success training was integral to delivering the change that would take place in the school for the coming years but would also provide a consistent approach taken by leadership group to develop each other and their staff. Given the amount of change the school undertook, it was important to have support such as this in place, as recognised by one of the Assistant Principals;

> "Although Peter may not be working directly with the classroom teacher, his role has been to further develop the capacity of his leadership team and the people that he is working with, his principals and leading teachers. So in terms of his leadership, he has developed their styles and driving them and their ability and the tools to take on all of those other areas we have just mentioned, whether it be an orderly learning environment, curriculum, the moderation, the work of the CDTs, collaboration. So upskilling them to take on the challenges and largely due to the coaching process, coaching for improvement, coaching for success as well" (AP2)

This approach to turning around Northern College was exactly the case as Peter stated, "Every move that we have made here is to do with change, whether it is attendance, the satisfactory completion policy, guaranteed and viable curriculum, explicit instruction model, peer coaching, has all started with the leadership team implementing it first" (P2)

Peter was very aware of what lay ahead for him when he first began at the school in 2008. He recognised the importance of having a very strong team to work with, identifying staff who would be open to building their capacity as leaders and committing to the task that lay ahead;

> "In all of this I realise I couldn't do it on my own, they just would have kicked me off. I had to get a Principal class around me, that was number one, that would work and was responsive. At the same time train up the leadership team, leading teachers, provide them with PD" (P1).

Outlined earlier in this section, Peter symbolised the importance of the Principal Class team by allocating two and a half hours per week to meet with these members. Peter saw these meetings as opportunities to build the leadership capacity of the key leaders across the College. As well as address the different priority areas of the school and build important collaborative practices, this meeting would use strategic literature to enhance the leadership team's knowledge and support evidence based decision making. This was one of a number of key strategies that developed the leadership capacity of his staff, which also included;

- *Coaching for Success* professional development,
- 'Emerging Leaders' workshops with university professors,
- coaching conversations
- modelling of behaviours

He knew he had a major role to play in the development of the leadership team and was very 'hands on' in doing so;

> "I look after all of the Principal Class. I coach them each week. Sometimes I am at each campus twice a week. There isn't a time when I am not talking to one of them about where we're going and what they need to do and they are asking me questions. I do the same for each of the campus principals" (P2)

The time, the energy and commitment Peter placed in this area was not lost on his Principal Class, as the members highlighted their perspectives during the interview process;

> "He's totally focused on building the capacity of his leaders. He really believes that that's the number one thing. He does a lot of other things but that's definitely what he would say is the main thing. It's true, because unless he is creating a team of people below him who can go on and do it, it's never going to happen. By focusing on building our capacity, and the way he has built our capacity through the coaching, not just delegating but wanting to know everything that's going on through asking questions, but in such a supportive and caring way, then it means he is modelling to us the way in which we can model to the people that are working for us" (CP2).

There was a clear level of trust and respect that was shown during the interview process, as staff reflected on the work Peter had completed to develop the leadership capacity of staff;

> "Even though he wants to be the best and he wants the school to be the best, he really genuinely wants the people, he's really fatherly in terms of the younger leaders he is looking after and he actually wants them to go on to be good leaders. It's as much about their success as it is his." (CP2)

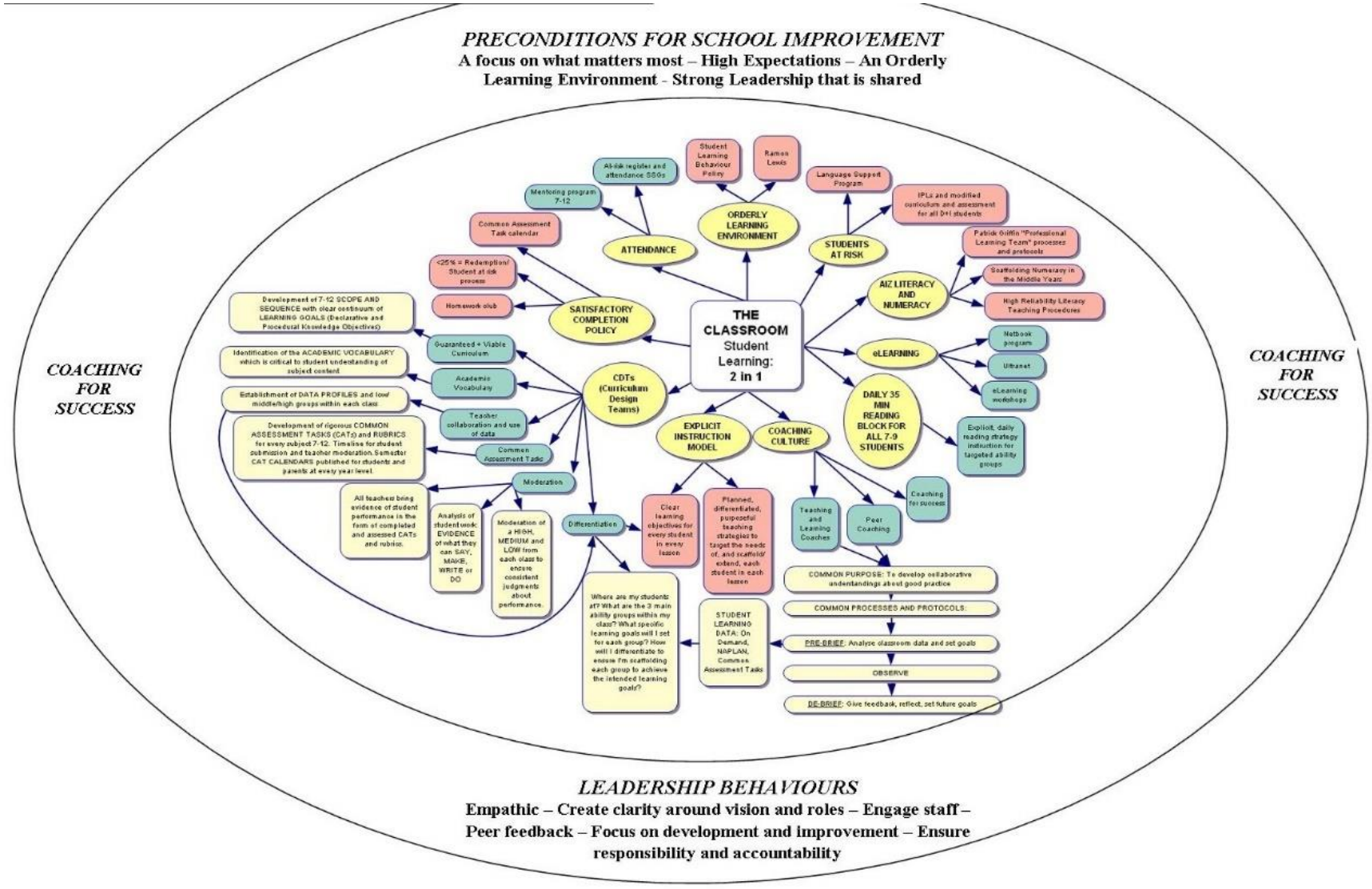


Figure 4.5: The 'Road Map' - an illustration of Northern College's school vision and direction.

On reflection, the difference he had made to the leadership of the school and his imminent departure, Peter was confident things were in place to sustain the improvement practices put in place;

> "Any transition will have its problems from one leader to another. I think the leadership team are strong enough and know the direction, there are six of them, to take it forward. I have empowered them enough to know that they just don't sit back. That's what you want is a leadership team like that so they feel empowered and they don't have to come back to you about every decision they make" (P3)

Other staff recognised the issue of principal turnover but also supported the idea that the sustainability of the practices would be possible because of the confidence in the school leadership remaining;

> "That was a big part of the turnaround, he has constantly talked to us about how we're going to make it sustainable. I think everything he has done works and continues on. We as a Principal Class, despite our differences of opinion, all believe in what we are doing and will continue. I do think it sustainable" (CP2)

Peter invested heavily in building the capacity of his leadership group to ensure change could happen using a distributed approach. He identified early on that it would have been impossible for him to implement change across a multi-campus school single-handedly, so he delivered professional development that empowered a large group. Peter developed his team in such a way that the change that was undertaken could be sustained beyond his principalship.

4.8.7 Demonstrated Situational Leadership

Reflecting on his time at Northern College, Peter described his leadership style at the very beginning as directive. He argued this style was necessary based on the context at that time;

> "We had a leadership team that was really divided and argumentative and all they wanted to do was to discuss because that was a way to put things off and I recognise that. I wasn't using a collaborative leadership style it was more a directive style. I decided where we were heading and we just went there" (P1)

Examples of Peter's directive leadership came in the form of introducing the Coaching for Success professional development. This was fundamental to the success of the school moving into the future and, as discussed in the previous section, formed the foundation on which he could build the capacity of the leaders at Northern College. Peter also demonstrated directive leadership by introducing assistant principals at each campus. He felt the inclusion of these

leadership positions would strengthen each site by providing greater support and accountability at each campus. This was necessary in the beginning of Peter's tenure as the leadership experience and capability of the leadership group was low;

> "All I wanted to do was instead of "ready, aim", I wanted to do, "ready and fire". They never made a decision about anything. If you tried to make a decision, they held you up. So I just ran in over the top of it" (P1)

Peter's direct style of leadership could be attributed to his experience as a leader. He was very open in acknowledging that some of his, "initiatives" at Northern College were a direct copy from previous schools he had led.

> "We had to have a changeover in campus policy for staff, so I just pinched the one that I created previously" (P2)

There were a number of instances where Peter's experience could be drawn from and it supported the school improvement journey Northern College was taking;

> "We had an online review process which I had pinched from my previous school that I had developed. We had that looked at by an outside group that could do the programming a little differently" (P2).

This experience was not lost on his team of teachers as many of the individuals and groups interviewed recognised how this supported the change he made happen at Northern College;

> "Peter came in with a lot of experience. He knew exactly what needed to be done and when. He had a big leadership team and he was the driving force. He was taking us with him" (LT2)

The directive style of leadership was in contrast to the approach taken later in his tenure when he had developed the capacity of his leadership team to lead their teams. He transformed his leadership style as he developed the structures and processes within the school to support the amount of change that was taking place. The turnaround required by the school when he first arrived required a direct style of leadership with minimal consultation, whereas, after time building the capacity of his leadership group, a more distributive style of leadership was apparent. This distributive style of leadership was recognised by many of the groups interviewed (AP2, LT2, AP1, SCP), but also by Peter himself;

> "I have been a lot more collaborative from the year 2010 in terms of leadership, I had to. I wanted to involve more of them and we were developing the leadership team" (P1)

The Principal Class team was crucial to the change process at Northern College and allowed Peter to change his leadership style as their capacity grew;

> "The Principal now works with the Principal Class first before that is shared more widely to the rest of the leadership team. It was then up to the broader leadership group to make it happen with the teachers" (LT2)

These structures were not lost on the teachers and they felt valued and understood the role they played in the change process.

> "Previously, responsibility was not as distributed as they are now. About three quarters of staff currently have a leadership role. There is a lot of consultation now. We are proud of the changes we are making to children's lives" (LT2).

As a result of the structures and processes put in place, it was noted by a number of the interviewees that the school improvement journey could be sustained beyond Peter's tenure (AP1, AP2, SCVP, SCP);

> "The challenges for the principal incumbent to make sure they are aware of the processes and structures the (previous) Principal has put in place and keeps them there. To keep that collaborative nature and to keep that distributive leadership style, to keep the teaching and learning coaches, to keep the leading teachers to take on that coaching and mentoring role to develop other staff" (AP2)

The theme of Peter changing his leadership style from the beginning to the end of his tenure at Northern College was clear. Peter's directive style of leadership sought firstly to develop the capacity of his staff, with an emphasis on the leadership team first. The purpose of developing the leadership team was to support the vision of the school and to begin to look at ways the leadership group could work collaboratively with all staff to reach the goal. Ultimately, Northern College sought a distributive style of leadership that allowed a vast majority of staff to feel an ownership of the decisions that were made. Throughout the process, Peter demonstrated the style of leadership required at that point in time of the school improvement journey, and he went about creating the right conditions for his team to work most effectively.

4.8.8 Developed Positive Mindset

The chronic social disadvantage experienced by the students attending Northern College over a long period of time influenced the expectations students had of themselves and teachers had of their students. This fixed mindset and low expectations were apparent to Peter from the very first moment he met with the leadership team. Standing together outside one of the campus sites at the end of the day, the school leadership group were challenged by Peter, "spot me a kid with a bag?" Only some of the students had a school bag, highlighting the fact that there were few demands placed on the students to complete work at home.

On another occasion, Peter questioned the time school started, as he watched students arrive at school any time up to 10:00am. School began at 9:00am. The mindset staff had about the students and the resulting low expectations, were apparent throughout the interviews and evidence of a change in students and teachers' mindset about what was expected of them was made clear (P1,P2,P3,CP1,CP2,AP1,AP2,LT1,LT2,SCP,SCVP,ESS,S1,PR1).

During the interview process, there were numerous references to the school context before Peter arrived. These included;

> "Sometimes you would go into the staffroom and you have got well-meaning staff but you would feel depressed because you would hear things like, "you don't understand the kids, this community, they can't do this…"" (CP1)

> "It used to be that these kids have so many problems, these kids can't, and we can't expect more of these kids" (CP2)

> "The three high schools that were here prior to the amalgamation they all had very poor self-esteem" (SCP)

This soon changed as the leadership group grew greater capacities to lead and develop behaviours they knew could make a difference and the school was well into its improvement journey;

> "Having self-worth and believing in yourself, whether it is in your own leadership, believing in your staff, but importantly believing in your kids that they can achieve. You can't turn a school around if you do not think the kids can do it" (AP1)

Peter was very aware that the expectations and mindset of teachers on students needed to be the very first thing to change. He delved into educational research to find material that would support the challenge he faced and championed the quote "Low socioeconomic does not mean

low achievement" (Zbar et al., 2008). This statement became the centrepiece for change at Northern College. Peter convinced staff of what was possible by engaging them in professional reading that identified the ways students from schools with a similar profile to that of Northern College could achieve given the right opportunities;

> "I think the first thing was to convince the staff that you could achieve it. That was because they did not believe it. They did not believe you could do it" (P1)

As well as convincing the staff with the support of the educational research, Peter had to push further to ensure an attitudinal change. Over a long period of time, Peter turned around the mindset staff had of students and the expectations they placed on them. This change was recognised by many of the staff interviewed, who commented on a cultural change that had taken place;

> "The culture of staff was that, "they cannot do that" whereas now there is a belief all students can" (LT1)

> "We have worked on changing the culture from a negative mindset and one that cannot achieve to one that is positive and can achieve. It has changed because of the way leaders and teachers interact with students by modelling how students can achieve" (LT3)

This cultural change went beyond the classrooms and became part of all aspects of Northern College life, as the conversations between teaching and non-teaching staff also changed;

> "The teacher's developing a mentality that every child can learn and succeed has been so important. The students lacked a sense of aspiration. They now have a choice because teachers are not "writing them off". Every child has a choice to be what they want to be" (ESS)

The change in mindset can be attributed to any number of the change initiatives that took place at Northern College but most certainly placing a greater expectation on students to attend school every day and be on time was the first, very important step. With such an explicit expectation that influenced so many aspects of the school experience, it did not take long for the attitudes of the students to change;

> "I think the mindset of, 'I can't achieve', has been worn away and I think the kids start to believe in themselves and I think that is one of the greatest barriers. The kids believing in themselves but also the staff believing the kids can learn too. I

think that has been worked on quite a bit too. Belief is one of the larger ones, which is a bigger barrier than monetary and resourcing" (AP1)

Parents started to notice a difference also;

"Teachers say to my children, "you can be someone". The teachers are there for my children" (PR1)

This change in mindset was also observed during an observation of Northern College, where upon arrival at the beginning of the day, students and visitors were greeted by a teacher at the doorway. The teacher was there to greet all students and encourage them to get straight to class using the phrase, "time counts". "Time counts" was used with students so they recognised the importance of being in class on time and reminded them that students are expected to be seated at 8:45am ready for when the teacher arrives. If they are marked as 'late' three or more times in a week, they make up 30 minutes of time at lunchtime. This level of accountability set a clear expectation for students, aligning closely with the goal of reaching 90 per cent attendance.

The change in expectations and mindset of staff had a very positive effect on the students. It became visible to parents as Northern College's practices continued to change;

"During the school holidays, teachers came in and gave classes. Now, to me, I was gob-smacked. It was in the first few days of the holidays that they picked out English, maths and a couple of others. The kids weren't made to come, but I can tell you, they got full classes. Now that tells you that these kids want to do something and want to get somewhere and the school is helping them and they are taking it" (SCVP)

The strongest evidence of a change in attitude to schooling comes from the data shared earlier in this chapter, identifying the huge growth in tertiary offers to Northern College students. One could conclude from such an improvement that the attitude towards education had changed considerably over the duration of Peter's tenure. This positive attitude was evident during the student interviews, with every student responding to the question about where their future job prospects lie with an occupation that requires a tertiary qualification.

Students from Year 10, 11 and 12 responded;

"I have high aspirations. I am School Captain. General interests in law and politics. Looking at attending Deakin university"

"I would like to do something in law"

"My mum inspires me because she was a Biology teacher, my sister did Biomedical Science at uni. Drama gives me confidence – the teacher is great who inspires me. Latrobe Uni looks good for me".

Students in Year 9 responded;

"I want to become an architect and work overseas. I want to study hard to get a good ATAR, so I can attend a university overseas"

"I want to do IT programming. I want to work OS"

"I want to become a teacher. I want to go back to Africa and teach them to speak properly"

Such aspirations demonstrate the positive outlook the students attending Northern College have for themselves and the power of developing a positive mindset through shared high expectations of the leadership group, teachers and students.

4.8.9 Change management

The appointment of Peter to the Executive Principal position to oversee this school turnaround demonstrated the high regard with which his previous experience was held. Peter's vast experience in turning schools around was essential for this appointment. His appointment brought with it a renewed sense of hope amongst the community as highlighted by one of the school's parents who stated, "It (the school) was Brumby's baby, so I knew it had to be good". The reference to "Brumby's baby" was highlighting the school's location in the then Premier of Victoria's, John Brumby, electorate. One got the sense the 32-million-dollar amalgamation of three underperforming schools would not be allowed to fail.

Peter recognised the importance of being abreast of current educational approaches and his approach to change was strongly influenced by John Kotter's theory of change management. In fact, Kotter's (2005) book, "The Iceberg is Melting", was used by Peter as a reading for his Principal Class team to build their capacity for and understanding of change. Peter made a note for each member of his Leadership team inside the cover of their copy of Kotter's book stating, "The iceberg is melting at Northern College, what will your contribution to leadership be?" This message was a subtle way Peter highlighted the role each member of the team had in turning around this failing school.

The practice of change management was recognised more strongly by the Principal Class team (P, CP2,AP1,AP2), with whom Peter was more explicit with about the process of change and their role within it. His approach was systematic and strategic;

> "There was no use in me arriving here in August 2008, and saying you need an explicit instruction model, you need a distributed leadership, everyone's got to have a position of responsibility, we are going to do peer coaching and everybody is going to watch each other's classes, we are going to focus on literacy and numeracy and everyone is going to do professional development with me etc etc. It would have been too much. So what I did over a period of time in sequence, is to pick the things that would have the most impact, especially on the leadership team, and put those in place and then systematically work on managing that change until that happened and then move onto the next bit of change." (P2)

The introduction of Kotter's literature meant the Principal Class group was familiar with the theoretical process for successful change;

> "I think that was one of the things he did as well, he highlighted the urgency of the challenges ahead of us and we were receiving students with literacy levels that were two years or below. I remember one specific staff meeting where he showed a student reading at a Year 4 level, he was a Year 7 student. He played the video to all the staff to elicit a response, to generate a sense of urgency" (AP2).

Highlighting the urgency for change is a key part of Kotter's change process (Kotter, 1996). The amalgamation of three schools into one College and the transformation of those schools from old, run down buildings to 'state of the art' learning facilities, along with the employment of an Executive Principal highlighted the huge change that was being undertaken. Such a restructure created a climate of change and much upheaval for the staff.

> "Because of the project itself, there were many indicators to people that change was going to happen whether they liked it or not at a whole range of levels" (CP1)

Although this level of change was upsetting for some staff, others could see the opportunities;

> "The change agenda was set for the context, where the whole focus was about change, regeneration, innovation and education" (CP1)

With this context in mind, the leadership group, through the leadership and guidance of Peter and supporting research literature, identified the key areas for improvement for students to achieve. These were;

- Ensuring an orderly environment
- Strong Leadership that is shared
- High levels of expectation and teacher efficacy
- A focus on key priorities

With these as the key ongoing ingredients to changing the school, Peter and the Principal Class team set about making numerous changes to the daily running of the school. Each of these changes would employ the leadership skills they had drawn from the Coaching for Success professional development sessions. These were an integral part of every piece of change that took place;

> "You had to stage it. You had to set out the expectations, manage it on the ground in terms of how it was going, give people additional support, reading up on it, provide examples of good practice and constantly working on it so that to develop further strategies to give messages, engaging the community and kids and supporting them but having that expectation. That was one process and that had to be done at a million and one levels in different aspects of the change agenda that we had in front of us" (CP1)

One of the first, most visible changes was to develop expectations around attendance. As discussed earlier, it was mandated that students' attendance should be questioned if it fell below 90%. This change required the leadership group to highlight the sense of urgency for the change.

> "The Principal used a student in Year 10 to highlight the urgency, by saying this child had only experienced two years of high school" (LT3)

Staff were quick to suggest that attendance officers were required to monitor attendance; however, the leadership team pushed for the staff to take accountability for monitoring their students' attendance. This expectation, according to one of the leadership group, sought to support another piece of the change agenda, that of building a guiding coalition;

> "That highlighted the Principal's purpose of getting the right people in the right places with the moral purpose to do the right thing" (AP2)

Building a guiding coalition would lead the school towards a culture of higher expectations becoming the 'norm'. Although some staffing changed because of the change in expectations, it was clear that staff also changed as a result of performance.

> "It's funny now because if we look at who our worst teachers are, but back then they were some of our best, because our standards have been raised" (CP2)

There was not just natural attrition that led to this staff change. Some of it can be attributed to Peter being prepared to have the tough conversations with underperforming staff;

> "He's sort of looked at the teaching class, as well as the principal class within the school environment and for those that didn't make the grade, which is the best way to describe it, have not had their contracts renewed or have been asked to move on" (SCP)

By having these conversations whilst developing a group of staff who supported and believed in the vision and direction of the school, meant the changes that were communicated and taking place had a greater chance of success.

The level of communication that was around the change being undertaken was quite extensive. Kotter (1996) describes the importance of communicating the change vision and this was not lost on Peter. The success of this aspect of the change was made stronger as Peter moved from his directive leadership to a more distributed model, which enabled more leaders to be empowered, to communicate the vision at every opportunity, and to model the types of behaviours now expected at Northern College;

> "Putting those right people into positions with the right skills, qualities and attributes to further skill up others and then that constant coaching for improvement, coaching for success overlap, checking that monitoring and support as well to get improvement" (AP2).

Celebrating short term wins, a key aspect of Kotter's change management theory, was also a key aspect of Northern College's turnaround (Kotter, 1996). These wins have been punctuated by data or documents. Attendance data was easy to track and most individual interviews and some group interviews discussed the data of attendance and how it had improved very quickly (P1, P2, P3, CP1, AP1, AP2, LT1);

> "We want to change, we want to improve and we want to keep going. We have seen some changes, we have seen some improvement and we want to keep going with that" (AP1)

Attendance was one example of change undertaken by Northern College during Peter's tenure. The change process outlined for the expectation of attendance could also apply to any number of major structures and practices changed during the Principal's tenure including;

- Developing the capacity of the leadership team
- Implementing a Coaching model across the College
- Developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Developing a common pedagogical approach (Explicit Instruction Model)
- Creating purposeful CDTs.

It was clear Peter's focus on building the capacity of his leadership team to manage the process of change supported the College in navigating a great deal of change during his tenure. His relentless pursuit of change for improvement, and the use of Kotter's change management framework helped achieve great results for the students that attended Northern College (Kotter, 1996)

4.9 Summary of Principal Practices

The vision and clear directions Peter developed at Northern College emphasised the accountability placed on staff to demand a high level of professionalism, appropriate student work habits and providing students a valuable education that would set them up for life beyond school. The demand of such a student-centred approach was accompanied by many support mechanisms for staff, such as professional development, guidance with instructional practices, curriculum development, policies and collaboration.

There was a strong emphasis placed on building leadership capacity to support the vast change that was undertaken. Peter began by employing directional leadership to ensure the foundation was strong upon which this change could happen. Targeted professional development and the creation of curriculum design teams ensured the practice of staff was consistent and relevant to the context of the school and cohort of its students. Peter's leadership team moved towards a more collaborative style after much coaching and support.

Using the stronger capacity of his leadership team and backed by research, Peter was relentless in his pursuit of implementing change that would support student learning. Much of the change that took place at Northern College can be attributed to the change in thinking of the staff and students from a history of underachieving that led to a fixed mindset to one of 'anything is possible'. Overcoming such a contextual hurdle was testament to the strong moral purpose that began from the Peter and quickly spread to the leadership group, teachers and wider community.

4.10 Principal Leadership Characteristics

The transformation of Northern College can be attributed to Peter's tenure as Executive Principal. His relentless manner to reach the high expectations set for his staff was demonstrated through his commitment to serve others, underpinned by his strong moral purpose for education to all. His strong moral purpose highlighted his integrity, which influenced every decision he made to be of benefit to the students' outcomes. These characteristics supported his visionary nature that provided all staff at Northern College with the clear path he was directing them to. Along the way, Peter developed strong trust with his staff, particularly his Principal Class team.

Table 4.10 lists the themes identified through the interviews with a variety of stakeholders from Northern College and the frequency of which these themes were encountered through each of the interview groups.

Each of these themes are explored further in the section below.

Table 4.10: Number of interview comments attributed to themes of Principal characteristics

	P	CP1	CP2	AP 1	AP 2	LT1	LT2	LT3	SCP	SCVP	ESS	S1	S2	PR	Total
Strong Moral Purpose	26	9	9	9	11	1	6	3	5	3	7				89
Relentless	39	2	19	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	1				74
High Expectations	9	8	8	2		2	5		6	3	5			2	50
Strong Communicator	19		2			2		2	8	5	7			3	48
Trust	6	2	6	1	3	1	1	5	1		2				28

4.10.1 Strong Moral Purpose

From the first few moments of interviewing Peter, he made reference to the moral purpose of education by connecting to comments made about the recent civil unrest in the city of Baltimore in reaction to the death of a black person in custody (CBS News - https://www.cbsnews.com/news/baltimore-riots-leave-20-police-officers-hurt-one-person-critical/). Peter cited the commentators of this news story;

> "This starts in schools. They have got no chance of going anywhere if the schools don't make a change" (P1).

This immediate indication of the importance Peter places on the role of schools and education in our society demonstrates the depth of his moral purpose. He reflected that this strong moral purpose for education was one of the reasons he became a teacher, as he remembered seeing old school friends "pop up in Coles or wherever" and thinking, "what future have they got. It stuck with me".

On no less than 26 occasions over three interviews, Peter demonstrated his strong moral purpose in numerous ways;

He made reference to the work in the classroom with the students as "what matters most". The classroom is "where you get the most impact".

- He had a burning desire to do everything he could for the kids, stating, "that is why I am here and I can get the kids to achieve" and that a good education gives students, "a chance in life".
- He was prepared to make difficult decisions around staffing to ensure the best person was in front of the students and he went to great lengths to attract the best staff to his school stating, "I am evening it up for the kids". In doing this, Peter demonstrated the high integrity with which he worked.

These examples were vindicated by the staff at Northern College, as they too made it clear that his strong moral purpose was a large reason why the school had transformed itself. The staff working with Peter identified his moral purpose as the key driver for him to achieve his goals. So much so, it was clear the staff realised that Peter would do almost anything to ensure what he believed to be right could be achieved;

> "…because he is so driven and aligns it to his moral purpose, he will break the rules or bend the rules or be strategic in ways because he has such an absolute vision about where we need to get to and he will do whatever he can to get there" (CP2)

Such a strong, clear direction resonated with his staff, with one commenting;

> "Peter would say how things used to be but to focus on what is happening now and how we want it to be in the future. Knowing in the end that we wanted to commit to student outcomes, was fantastic for me. I wanted to be part of this because I felt he was honest in his commitment to the kids and their success" (CP1)

Staff could identify the work Peter did to ensure that his strong moral purpose was also backed by appropriate actions. To achieve their very best, Peter worked directly with the leadership teams to build their capacity;

> "To support students to achieve their best Peter has been building leadership capacity and making sure they have that sense of moral purpose. Yes we have stacks of kids coming into Year 7 that are way behind but we can catch them up if we are relentless, if we are urgent and focused on student learning. We believe we can. So focus on leadership capacity, making sure they have all got that moral vision, making sure they have all got that relentless drive to make it happen and to believe it can happen" (CP2).

Peter's indirect influence in getting the best outcomes for students at Northern College was also highlighted;

> "He encourages teachers to develop programs to support the kids, making sure and ensuring that funding is available and working out how to spread it widely enough so that programs that support the students' learning is implemented and shared" (AP1).

As discussed in the Principal's Practices section, Peter worked particularly hard to collaborate with external agencies to secure support for his staff to provide opportunities for students that would otherwise be unattainable.

Peter made his strong moral purpose clear to staff in his communication, as well as his actions. His vision was clearly defined by the moral obligation that the school had to offer the best education for its students. Peter's commitment and drive to achieve this vision was made possible by his moral purpose.

4.10.2 High Expectations

One of the more significant changes that took place at Northern College was the change in expectation. It was clear from the beginning that Peter had very high expectations of himself. As discussed in the previous section, he understood the importance of his role and what that meant to his students' future livelihood. As such, Peter was committed to transforming Northern College. Peter's first interview outlined the lack of expectation amongst staff and students at the school, reflecting on the fact students were not even expected to bring a bag to school. Such stories were supported by other staff who described how teachers had to carry their own stationery to each class so students had something to write with.

Holding high expectations, required Peter to have many difficult conversations with staff about their ongoing employment and/or their ability to fulfil the leadership positions they held. Although trying at the time, Peter knew the school would not be able to achieve what was required if the expectations of staff did not lift.

Once Peter communicated the professional expectations of staff, he required staff to reinforce these higher expectations onto their students. Initially, this was addressed through the attendance expectations placed on students, which has been discussed in some detail in the Principal Practices section. Peter was clear with his staff the reason for these expectations;

> "If they are not here, they are not going to learn" (P1)

To support the staff with these high expectations of students, Peter would conduct role plays of what teachers should do if students were not attending their class;

> "I remember one staff meeting, they must have thought I was on drugs, I had someone in front of me and I went through a scenario and just pretended that student had missed my class and what I was going to do about it. They didn't understand that they could say or do this. They don't know how to talk to their students about their behaviour or their expectations. We did a lot of that" (P1)

This was an important way Peter supported his staff, while at the same time set the expectation required of them to teach at the school.

Staff recognise that they are pushed to improve themselves and their students by having expectations;

> "The culture is definitely where we push people a lot; there are a lot of meetings, there is a sense you are constantly pushing, you are constantly improving" (CP2)

Although having high expectations is an admirable characteristic, it can also provide its challenges, as outlined by one of the interviewees;

> "You have to be careful of that sometimes (setting higher expectations); one of the things we picked up from Helen Cahill (Professor Helen Cahill from The University of Melbourne), is the importance of building that more positive culture with the staff as well. And I think before we were so intent and we had this relentless focus on the two in one, that sometimes I got feedback from staff that way you're always telling them that they were not doing a good enough job. I understand why they would've got that sense…" (AP2)

This attention to setting the bar ever higher was apparent whilst discussing the professional development of his staff. Peter was proud to say that the school had been part of a review of professional development opportunities for teachers in Australia (Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann & Cooper, 2014). In comparison to the other schools in the report, Peter felt as though they had the strongest model, yet he was still not satisfied with the model and wanted to improve it further. This example of Peter pursuing high expectations, in all avenues of the College, is an admirable quality as he strived for improvement. However, a balanced reflection of the school's achievements was required to ensure the short term wins were acknowledged and celebrated for the benefit of all in the community who were striving to be part of a great school.

Through Peter's high expectations of staff and particularly his leadership team, he began to achieve change that was noticeable and build the capacity of his leadership team to address any issues of not meeting expectations;

> "We put a lot of effort into our leadership behaviours that then translated into things that are said. People were challenged if those behaviours they were demonstrating did not reflect the moral purpose and the focus of engagement of the kids for their improvement. So, the culture and behaviours we expect, we have worked pretty hard, so now with VCE improvement, people's capacities to reflect on their practice, be at class on time, to expect certain things of kids, to run workshops, to follow up on attendance, to follow up on homework etc, the behaviours expected of them are the behaviours you expect of good teachers" (CP1).

Northern College's School Council President stated it best when he referred to Peter's high expectations of staff;

> "He has his benchmarks and he expects everyone else to have a similar idea as well. If you are not quite there, he will grab you and drag you along" (SCP).

Not to be taken literally, this observation highlights Peter's commitment to ensure the school achieves the best it can for its students. He is prepared to work hard and support all staff to meet the expectations they have of one another.

4.10.3 Relentless Approach

Peter's relentless approach to achieving the vision he aspired to for Northern College was a testament to his commitment and the high expectations he had for himself and his staff.

This was evident in numerous ways and referred to on at least one occasion by every member that was interviewed. His relentless nature centred around the priorities the school had set and identified in Figure 4.5, the 'Road Map'.

In all priority areas, Peter would pursue with unrelenting commitment. He identified and was recognised by his colleagues for his unwavering support through coaching, questioning and modelling. Particular references of note included;

- Recruitment of teachers to Northern College, and
- Building leadership capacity

Peter's relentless approach in these two themes will now be explored in greater detail.

4.10.3.1 Relentless in the recruitment of staff

Within the first few minutes of meeting Peter, he identified finding the right people for the job as one of his main drivers. He often likened a school to a football team, where you had to go and target the best players to play for your team because you know that is the best for the collective group. References towards recruiting high quality staff was mentioned at least 47 times over the three interviews with Peter. One of his approaches was to identify the teachers his school needed and invite such people into the school to have a conversation and school tour to promote the opportunities and encourage their interest in joining the staff. Peter was quite strategic in the way he approached recruiting;

> "I think the school improvement journeys need really strong people to take them forward. All of the time I have hunted these people. I would invite the people over, talk to them, and get them to commit. I would then advertise the position. I knew the people who had a burning sensation in their belly to get the job done. I knew when they had it and I would think, " right, I will advertise this position now and get it on the system tonight" (P1).

Peter realised it was of mutual benefit if he could recruit good quality staff;

> "But you constantly look for the best staff. And if you can surround yourself (with quality staff), as the principal, it will lift you and you will go to different heights in your leadership and you will be challenged by it. You will improve further your own leadership skills" (P2)

Peter took the same approach in developing the right mix on his school council;

> "Going and getting the councillors, finding the good parents and then going and explaining to them what it is. Most of them come on board and it is a good council at the moment and has been all the time. It wasn't when I first arrived" (P1).

4.10.3.2 Relentless in building the capacity of staff

Peter has been relentless in developing his staff's capacity. As discussed in the Principal Practices section, this was one of his key practices and was pursued in multiple ways. Peter was relentless in pursuing different opportunities to support staff in ways such as providing;

- Targeted professional development for his leadership team to support change
- Research literature to staff that supported their developing understanding of the school's context and improvement trajectory
- External consultants on a regular basis to provide advice and professional support
- Time allocated within their teaching load to develop curriculum and teaching practices.

Clearly, Peter recognised that he required a great deal of support to pursue change in this context but he was also very prepared to build his leadership team's capacity by modelling the right behaviours and actions;

> "He's totally focused on building the capacity of his leaders. By focusing on building our capacity, and the way he has built our capacity through the coaching, then it means he is modelling to us the way in which we can model to the people that are working for us. That's what's creating the culture, the modelling that he is providing. He knows it and he never gives up on it and it never changes and he never forgets" (AP2)

Peter regularly met with his leadership team to support their priorities and address any issues that had arisen. These were coaching opportunities and Peter would take advantage of them to influence his leaders in a way that aligned with his leadership style;

> "I had a meeting with Peter after (a meeting with the campus leadership team) and he said, "well then if they don't drive it....", he basically said to me that if they are resisting and blocking, what are you doing about it? I was a little taken aback by that, but it's true. Peter is so persistent, whereas the assistant principal and I were not pushing the leading teachers hard enough. By Peter asking me that, he made me think that I need to do what Peter does to me and that is go in and meet with the leading teachers and really push them to enforce the change. Peter pushes us so we are constantly pushing everyone else in a nice way" (CP2)

The characteristic of relentlessly pursuing excellence is a feature of Peter's leadership style. Such an attribute requires strong commitment and endless energy to achieve, both of which are obvious characteristics of Peter. He has never sat back and relied on chance. Peter has constructed his organisation in a way that he believes will maximise its potential, and is ultimately good for its students.

4.10.4 Strong Communicator

When Peter first arrived at Northern College, he was quick to make connections with his colleagues. There had been a great deal of publicity around his arrival and staff were speculating as to what that would mean for their school, jobs and livelihood. He was quick to communicate the understanding he had of the school's context and history and how this shaped his moral purpose as a school leader;

> "When he talked about his own background that seemed sincere. He talked about the challenge for him as a young person was he did not have access to educational resources that he thought were going to be the best for him and he thought that if he came back into the area he wanted to ensure the kids got that. It was a nice story but it had to be worked out in reality. He then talked about that as leaders we needed to demonstrate this, instil trust with his leadership team by communicating the message" (CP1)

Such a clear message provided staff with a greater understanding of Peter's intentions and style. The value he placed on strong communication became embedded in the practices he nurtured in his leadership team. During the Principal Class meetings, held every week, opportunities to enhance communication skills were provided. Peter reflected on how the Principal Class team got to a point where they were trying to outdo one another with their presentations. Peter made it clear how important their communication skills were to make changes across the College;

> "I said to the Principal Class, "If I ever catch you going around someone (not directly communicating with them), don't. You go directly to them and change their behaviour. If you go around them, you'll need a roadmap to get around the school" (P3)

These opportunities were not lost on his Principal Class team;

> "The tool that we used as a leadership team was to develop skills in how to have conversations with colleagues and kids, but not to dismantle them, to maintain

> empathy, sympathy and acknowledgement of what is good, were integral parts. It is a fantastic tool because you are not dismantling but you are giving people honest feedback about something that you have established. That has changed the culture, I think" (CP1)

The development of the leadership team's communication skills formed not only through explicit experiences but also through their daily interactions with Peter;

> "When it comes to the implementation of things and the details, he will call me in and talk with me every morning on the phone and he's got a diary with all these little post-it notes and runs through the things he needs to check with me. He is not just doing this with me but he's doing it with everyone, office staff, everyone" (CP2)

These interactions highlighted the strength of Peter's communication style. He was able to personalise, demonstrate a strong interest and offer much support to each of his Principal Class team members to ensure they could then articulate the message to their team clearly and with confidence.

Although, not as personalised with the broader leadership team, Peter recognised the value of regular interactions with the campus leadership groups through his fortnightly meetings. These meetings were consistent in communicating what was important to ensure the College was achieving its goals;

> "He would often bring us together, we would have our leadership meeting every fortnight. These were to ensure we kept our finger on the pulse, what are our targets, how are we travelling, what are our actions, where are we at, and how do we move to the next step" (AP2)

Throughout the interview process, it was clear the emphasis Peter placed on communicating a clear, consistent and strong message. This message was always centred around the things that mattered most and so were aligned to the "Road Map" (Figure 4.5) developed by the leadership team to communicate the College's action plan. Much like the action plan focuses the staff, Peter utilised his conversations as a way to address an essential part of his leadership role;

> "The most difficult job of a principal is to make people accountable. Not in a coercive way but a supportive, persuasive way" (P1).

Through his strong communication style, Peter remained supportive of his staff but delivered a clear message that was aimed to achieve what was best for the students of Northern College.

4.10.5 Trust

It was important for Peter to build trust with his staff very quickly. He was the first Executive Principal appointed in Victoria's Department of Education and came to the school amidst calls for radical change for school improvement. Staff of the recently amalgamated school were unsure of what to expect from this media acclaimed, "Super Principal" (Tomazin, 2008). Peter's initial message to staff was his first attempt to build trust but also make clear his expectations. He knew the value of trust in building a collaborative, cohesive team and he went about it by getting the staff to believe they could make a difference;

> "The first thing is to convince the staff that you could achieve it (change for improvement). They did not believe that they could do it" (P1).

Whilst much time was spent changing the mindset of staff towards the challenge ahead, Peter always provided opportunity and support for staff to build their capacity. This process of placing trust in staff, and showing they can achieve given the right opportunities, was the foundation upon which the trust was built.

Many of these support mechanisms have been outlined in the Principal Practices section such as;

- Providing coaching for leadership team to effectively lead their teams
- Providing time to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum to ensure teachers could deliver an effective program to students
- Adopting a common approach to teaching that was supported by observations and feedback from coaches, who had been trained in the Coaching for Success program.
- Opening up the classrooms and building collaborative practices
- Adapting his leadership style from a directive to distributive approach as the capacity of his leadership team grew.

The value and importance Peter places on his leadership group is understood by his staff. Although tumultuous in the beginning due to the turnover of staff, once the core group of leaders at Northern College was formed, these staff knew they were fully supported by Peter and could reciprocate in their commitment to the school improvement journey. They could see through his words and actions that he had full trust in his leaders that demonstrated the capacity to make a difference;

> "His value of leadership and pushing people towards that has been quite encouraging for me and I really appreciate that aspect of his leadership. He has

> enabled people, if they have the drive, the capacity and the experience to step up to the leadership roles. There are lots of opportunities for that here. A lot of people are encouraged to take on those roles when they come up" (AP1).

Peter has developed this culture through a collaborative process. He has included others in developing the way forward and as such, has built trust with staff through the transparency of the journey;

> "I think the belief that we can and do make a difference is one that has certainly changed. The culture that Peter has created is something that has been a focus of our meetings where we look at what is the culture we are trying to create and how are we going to create it" (AP2).

This culture is one where leaders and teachers are open to feedback, prepared to try new things and are not afraid of failure because what is trying to be achieved is clearly communicated and support is in place. Such a culture is embedded in trust.

4.11 Summary of Principal Characteristics

The combination of Peter's key characteristics as a principal were essential to transform the school from the "basket case" (CP2) it was proclaimed to be to a school on an improvement trajectory. His strong moral purpose shaped from his personal experiences of growing up in a similar context was the foundation on which he made every decision and embedded within the vision he had for the school. Peter set high expectations for his staff and communicated these regularly to ensure they delivered the educational experience every student at Northern College deserved. Such high expectations did not come easily, but through his relentless drive for change, the clarity of his message and the support he offered staff, he was able to build the necessary trust for radical change to take place and for the school to move forward on its improvement journey.

4.12 Contribution of Others to Leadership and Success

Throughout this chapter, it has been highlighted that the success of the transformation of Northern College from three failing schools to an institution with a clear direction and aspiring students and teachers, could be attributed to more than just their transformational principal. Despite beginning his tenure with an authoritative style, Peter developed a structure that flourished within a distributive style of leadership.

First and foremost, the leadership structure enabled many to support the transformation through the clear roles and responsibilities aligned to each of their positions. Peter invested heavily in his leadership team, in particular his Principal Class team to ensure the College could move forward under the broader guidance of this group. The members of the Principal Class team knew the significance of their role and the importance of maintaining a strong connection with the core business of education;

> "(My role involves) being focused on the teaching and learning and getting into classrooms and keeping my finger on the pulse in terms of student learning and teacher practice" (CP2).

The Principal Class team also had a role in leading one of the areas of the Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), student learning, student engagement and wellbeing, student pathways and transition. Each of these areas had their own action plans that were developed and enacted by the Principal Class team and the broader leadership group. This shared responsibility ensured there was a broad group of leaders aiming to continually improve the progress and performance of the Northern College staff and students. The role of many of the school leaders stretch across a number of different areas of the school, as highlighted by one of the Assistant Principals;

> "I work with the teachers directly, I work with the curriculum leaders, I work with the team leaders and I work with the principal class team. My role goes across all of those. I also work in the student engagement and wellbeing area. We chair that part of the Annual Implementation Plan about key areas to do with engagement and wellbeing. So we oversee the everyday running of the student learning behaviour policy and the management of the behaviour across the school. Looking at it from an engagement with learning, how do we get kids at school, checking on their attendance, making sure they are at school on time, that they don't get exempted from class. We focus on how the team leaders and teachers manage that the students are there on time and, if they are not on time, how they work with the mentors, which are like the Homeroom teachers, to ensure phone calls to home are made and there are relationships built with home. Then we just look at the teacher perspective, how do teachers engage with the kids, how do they build positive relationships, how do they keep kids in class so that they are focussed and that the students' behaviours are appropriate" (AP1).

As a result of the breadth of Peter's collaborative skills, the School Council members could also identify the active role they played in ensuring the success of the school;

> "I think working hand in hand with Peter and the other school council members provided the necessary support they've needed" (SCP)

The leadership structure at Northern College supported a collaborative culture, as the different leadership teams met regularly and were responsible for driving the change that was necessary to transform three failing schools into one. Although Peter was the driving force of this change, the amount of change was insurmountable without the support of key stakeholders, including the leadership group and school council.

4.13 Chapter Summary

The case study of Northern College highlights the role of a transformational leader. When Peter arrived at Northern College, the school had amalgamated from three failing schools that all lacked vision, rigour and a hopeful future.

Through the guidance of an experienced leader the turnaround of Northern College's three campuses has been nothing short of inspirational. Peter has developed a clear and purposeful vision built on a shared moral purpose. This vision paved the way for his leadership style to move from an authoritative approach to one that enabled his vast leadership team to take responsibility and own the improvement journey the school had begun.

Northern College achieved a more distributive style of leadership, over time, as a direct result of the investment in coaching professional development. The skills and confidence the leadership group gained from this enabled a vast amount of change to happen over a short period of time. This, along with informed decisions around learning opportunities to develop staff helped to build the necessary expertise for rapid school improvement.

With staff capacity increasing at a fast rate, the change to the teaching and learning became more apparent. Through the development of Curriculum Design Teams and the curriculum itself, as well as the necessary assessment and moderation that accompanied this, Northern College began to reflect a high performing school. The introduction of teachers using a common methodology was symbolic of the change process that took place at Northern College on many different occasions at many different levels of the school. It was informed by research and employed by the leadership group before being imparted to all teachers by way of coaching opportunities provided to all staff.

The success achieved by the school over Peter's tenure was highlighted best by the percentage of students receiving tertiary offers. This statistic sky-rocketed from 63 to 98 per cent of students; there is no better measurement of the school achieving its vision statement of "developing a love of lifelong learning for their students while equipping them with the skills, qualifications and personal attributes they need for a purposeful and fulfilling life beyond school" (Northern College, 2015, np) . Along with this success was an upward trend in the school's VCE results, as well as some promising signs with their NAPLAN achievement scores.

At the heart of this transformation was the injection of positivity and hope Peter brought to the school. His catchphrase of "low socioeconomic does not mean low achievement" resonated with the staff, especially as Peter's relentless drive for improvement enabled staff to see what was possible. Through research based decision making and strong collaboration, the staff quickly began to trust the process of change and the leaders delivering it.

Such a culture was a far cry from what was experienced in the years prior to the amalgamation of the three failing schools. Peter's relentless commitment to quality education for all provided a school improvement journey that is a blueprint for others in similar contexts to study.

CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY B – EAST MEADOWS COLLEGE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will share the results from the analysis of data; interviews, school documentation and observations gathered from East Meadows College. The analysis was undertaken to identify, from multiple perspectives, the practices and characteristics of the principal of East Meadows College, and how these have contributed to the school's performance.

To understand the context within which these practices and characteristics have been observed and detailed, this chapter will address the following;

- Overview of the principal's history as an educator
- The school's profile and context including;
    - Physical environment
    - Enrolments and Attendance
    - Governance
    - School Context
    - School vision
    - Structure of leadership
    - School performance
- Principal Study
    - Principal practices
    - Principal characteristics
- Contribution of others in the success of the school

To gather information around school leadership and school context and how these influenced school performance, a variety of school community members were interviewed.

Those interviewed are listed in Table 5.1 below.

To enhance the understanding of the school context, culture and operations and to triangulate the findings through multiple perspectives, observations were also undertaken (see Table 3.4 for further details).

To protect the identity of the Principal studied in this chapter, she is referred to by the pseudonym of Kate.

Table 5.1: Participants interviewed as part of the research study

Participant Category	Abbreviation (Table 5.9, 5.11)	Number of participants	Number of interviews
College Principal	P	1	3
Assistant Principal	AP	1	1
Curriculum Leader	CL	1	1
School Council President	SCP	1	1
Business Manager	BM	1	1
Leadership Coach	LC	1	1
Leading Teachers 1	LT1	2	1
Leading Teachers 2	LT2	3	1
Leading Teachers 3	LT3	4	1
Parents	PR	2	1
Students 1	S1	4	1
Students 2	S2	5	1

5.2 Principal History

Kate's desire to be an educational leader began from her own experiences at school. By her own admission, she did not do well at school and attributed this to the fact she was disengaged. As a result, she entered tertiary education by unconventional means. Firstly, she attended university with her friends in an applied science course she was not enrolled in. Finally, the university allowed her admission into the course. It was this particular experience that she drew her catch-cry; "Don't ever say you can't, you can, you just might need to find a different way to get there". Kate eventually gained a teaching degree, as well as much experience in the hospitality industry to combine both to deliver Home Economics teaching in local technology schools. It was her experience in these schools, who not only educated local children but also those children who were wards of the state, i.e. the government were the guardians of these children because they did not have family caring for them. This experience developed Kate's deep moral purpose for education; enabling students to move beyond their current circumstances to have a more fulfilling life.

Whilst Kate was shaping her professional journey, she also experienced great personal hardship. Difficulty in having a family and a health scare built a resilience that would serve her well when faced with some of the professional challenges she would encounter later in her career.

As well as working in secondary schools, Kate also worked in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions. However, she found the "curriculum" outdated and far from the

progressive, innovative style that Kate would become renowned. As a result of her willingness to change the status quo, Kate was invited to lead a new Food Science program at another Technology school. She went on to be invited to help develop the Technology and Health aspect of the Curriculum Standards Framework (CSF). The CSF was a set of benchmarked standards for Victorian schools based on comparable measures both nationally and internationally. Over the following two years, Kate was enlisted to deliver professional development to teachers from across the state to familiarise them with the curriculum that had been written.

Following this experience, Kate was keen to re-enter a school where she knew she could make the most difference to the next generation of aspiring professionals. Kate set up some vocational options at a secondary school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, including Business Management and Hospitality courses. Kate was determined to ensure the students who undertook vocational studies gained the same recognition as those who completed the more common, Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE).

During her time in the eastern suburb school, Kate credits the leadership team with the description of being, “the highest performing team around”. Such an experience shaped her leadership approach. Kate became an assistant principal and then campus principal at this multi-campus school before being approached to become the Executive Principal at East Meadows College.

Kate began her role at East Meadows College in October, 2014. What drove her to ultimately take on the challenge of an underperforming school can be captured in a quote from Kate;

> “I live locally and I questioned why kids in this area should miss out. I hadn’t sent my children to this school. Most people I knew were not sending their children to this school, so something had to be done” (P1).

5.3 School Profile

5.3.1 Physical Environment

East Meadows College was established in 1975. A co-educational government school located approximately 32 kilometres east of the city centre of Melbourne. East Meadows College sits on a large site that looks out towards the Dandenong Ranges. The school is structured around two sub schools, a Junior School (Years 7 - 9) and Senior School (Years 10 - 12). Each school shares a courtyard space. The buildings wrap around each of the two courtyards to provide a quadrangle space where the students gather. The rooms are accessed via walkways around the

inside of the quadrangle, enabling students to remain undercover as they move between classes.

East Meadows College has numerous purposeful and custom built teaching and learning spaces including, a senior school study hub, resource centre, science laboratories, gymnasium, and emerging technology centres for food and information technology. Beyond the classrooms are extensive playing fields that were utilised by local clubs on the weekend for cricket and football games and clinics.

5.3.2 Enrolments

Enrolments at East Meadows College were in decline for many years prior to Kate's arrival. The school was at the crossroads, it needed to turnaround quickly or be forced to close. The government knew East Meadows College was required to meet the demand for secondary schooling in this part of Melbourne so proceeded to seek out an Executive Principal to drive the change required to turn the school around. The urgency of the turnaround was pronounced by the fact the student enrolment numbers had declined by nearly 70 per cent over 10 years (see Figure 5.1). The loss of enrolments also saw the level of school advantage (ICSEA value) decline by as much as 6.5 per cent illustrating the changing demographics of the school.

The problems faced by the school were highlighted by a school review organised by Kate on her arrival and conducted by the DET. Every staff member was asked if they would send their own child to the school, 100 per cent of staff replied that they would not. Given this lack of belief in the school by its own staff members, it was clear to see why the community had lost faith in its local secondary school.

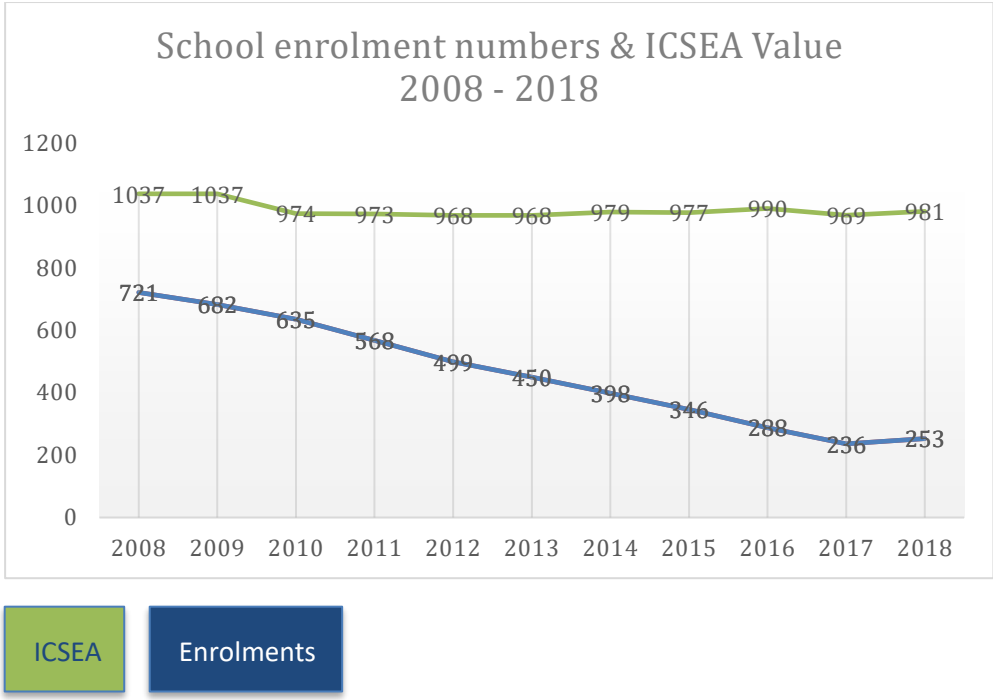


Figure 5.1: Student Enrolment numbers and ICSEA value

As highlighted in Figure 5.1, East Meadows College had its first enrolment increase in ten years in 2018. This marked three years since Kate took over as principal and had committed her principalship to enhancing the reputation and community perception of the school, which were key reasons given by participants throughout the interview process about the decline in enrolments;

> "We had heard things from the community, "Oh, you are going to work there?`` would be the response if I told them I was working at East Meadows. They used to do Auskick on the oval at the school and the community would see the graffiti and the weeds out of control" (LT1).

> "I think it was a bad school with bad people. My daughter went through a couple of really bad years" (PR).

> "I started here when there were 1000 students and we were quite successful. Then we dropped numbers dramatically. The community started to see this as a failing school for whatever reasons" (LT3).

The lack of community confidence in East Meadows contributed greatly to the demise of the student enrolment numbers, to the point that the school believed it deserved the reputation it now had. As well as doing everything she could to change the school's reputation, Kate required a cultural shift in the school to rebuild the pride and commitment in each of its members.

5.3.3 Attendance

Since Kate's arrival, the attendance of students at East Meadows College is now taken very seriously and students and their families are made aware of their responsibilities through regular communication and reference to the Attendance policy. The importance of attendance is highlighted with statements such as these:

- "Children and young people who regularly attend school and complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have better health outcomes, better employment outcomes, and higher incomes across their lives" and,
- "School helps people to develop important skills, knowledge and values, which set them up for further learning and participation in their community"

(East Meadows College, 2016, np)

The policy proceeds to outline how it will be implemented and managed. It begins by stating that illness should be the only reason for an absence, with all other absences requiring approval from the principal. If attendance is an ongoing issue, the Department of Education's attendance officer will be notified prior to the principal becoming involved. The school places a 90 per cent attendance expectation on all VCE students to pass their Year 12. The end result of unexplained absences will be communication with the Department of Human Services.

Table 5.2: Average absence breakdown per student over the last 5 years at East Meadows College

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
All Absences (days)	19.7	19.8	24.4	26.4	20.2
Unapproved Absences (days	9.0	10.6	12.9	12.3	7.2
% of absences approved	51	46.5	47.9	53.4	65

Despite the explicit approach the school takes to attendance, the figures in Table 5.4 demonstrate the challenge.

Table 5.2 highlights that attendance of students dropped over the first four years of Kate's principalship. However, the percentage of approved absences increased after two years. This indicates that the message of gaining permission for a student absence was being heard by the community and acted upon.

Overall, the attendance of students at East Meadows is recognised by the school as an ongoing concern. The annual report highlights the issues the school faces;

> "Student attendance data has continued to be impacted by a small number of students with long term health issues and a concerning number of families taking extended periods of time with their children for holidays during the school year" (East Meadows, 2018, np)

Despite explicitly stating in the policy that "The College will not approve repeated absence requests for vacations taken during the College term that may impact on long term educational outcomes for students particularly at VCE" (East Meadows, 2018, np), the issue of families taking extended periods of time for holidays during the school year continues.

5.3.4 Governance of School

As a government school, and like Northern College, East Meadows aligns with the Education Department's school governance guidelines outlined in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (DET, 2017).

Kate's relationship with the School Council is particularly strong. In fact, the School Council President attributes Kate to be the reason she wanted to be a member of the council.

> "My children were in Year 7 and Year 9 when I first stepped into School Council. That was roughly when Kate took over. I liked the direction she was given. The first time I heard Kate speak, I thought I could listen to her a lot, so I decided to join the council" (SCP).

This recognition is a clear indication of the support Kate receives from the school governance. Although it is important that the council members respect and value the opinion of the school principal, the impression of one parent suggests that there may not be the level of questioning or challenging of ideas that other councils may provide;

> "The impression I get is that Kate rules with an iron fist. My wife on School Council suggests they rubber stamp anything that Kate wants. The School Council is not as strong. There does not seem to be a strong presence of parents to be involved" (PR).

The School Council President would appear to support this impression when she described her role in the leadership of the school;

> "I really don't play a big part in it at all. I play a supportive role. I think Kate's vision for the school and supporting her in how she goes about achieving this is brilliant. I tend to speak to Kate about things. I don't guide her, she guides me. I think it is

> important for a principal to know it is their school to run and the council is there to back them up" (SCP).

The Education Department in 2019 provided resources to promote student voice in schools. One recommendation is to, "Link your student organisation or Student Representative Councils (SRC) to overall school decision making through election of students to School Council and appointment to other committees and bodies" (Sourced from http://www.vicsrc.org.au/uploads/files/VicSRC_Student%20Voice%20and%20EduState_Final_compressed.pdf on 29/6/19). East Meadows had initiated this practice prior to the Education Department making this recommendation, demonstrating Kate's commitment to student involvement in school decision making;

> "The government recently introduced student voice on council, we have had students on council since I came here. I also have a principal's student advisory group" (P)

Overall, school governance is strongly led by Kate with input from parents and students. Kate is now collaborative in her approach and involves all the key stakeholders in the decision making. However, Kate has a clear vision of what she wanted to achieve.

When Kate has required guidance and/or support from the DET, she knows who to talk to. She is well connected throughout the department and has made strong networks throughout her time in teaching. At the beginning of her tenure, Kate made a stance on the expectation of students to wear the correct uniform, with the consequences including a Saturday detention. The introduction of such a detentions was met with displeasure from the parents and Kate required the Department's support to ensure she could hold her ground. As a result of this support, students were soon complying and a new culture of high expectations had begun.

5.4 School Context

5.4.1 Level of Advantage

As outlined in greater detail in the methodology in Chapter 3, ICSEA is used by ACARA to measure the educational advantage of the students attending a school. In 2018, East Meadows' ICSEA was 981. Given the median for Australian schools is set at 1000 (ACARA, n.d.), this demonstrates that East Meadows was at a level of educational disadvantage based on student background factors. This low level of educational advantage is magnified when reviewing the distribution of students in accordance to their educational advantage. 42 per cent of students attending East Meadows are in the bottom quartile of students educational advantage relative

to all students across Australia. In fact, 72 per cent of the students are placed in the bottom 50 per cent of students across Australia according to their level of educational advantage (ACARA, 2019).

According to the local council's community profile created from the 2011 and 2016 census (Knox City, 2019), the school's educational advantage can be correlated with the statistics gathered from the wider community. These statistics have been drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2019) census, which is conducted every 5 years and is "the largest form of information gathering conducted in Australia".

5.4.2 Families and Employment

Table 5.3 provides a snapshot of key demographic features of the area surrounding East Meadows College and how this compares to the greater Melbourne area. This information highlights the number of single parent families in the area surrounding East Meadows College is slightly greater than the average across the Greater Melbourne area. The unemployment rate of 6.4 per cent, which is drawn from the suburb East Meadows is located in, demonstrates that it is less than the Greater Melbourne area. However, it can be noted that it is one of the highest in the council area, as this council has an overall unemployment rate of 5.6 per cent.

Table 5.3: Key Demographic Features of East Meadows College Community versus Greater Melbourne Area (from 2016 Census)

	Area Surrounding East Meadows College (%)	Greater Melbourne Area (%)
Single parent families	12.1	10.1
Unemployment	6.4	6.8

The lack of diversity in the school community is a reflection of the wider community. Dominated by Anglo-Saxon cultural groups, the community that populates the East Meadows community is made up of 77 per cent of people that identify as Australian, English, Irish or Scottish (see Table 5.4). The diversity of the local community has remained quite stable since the previous census, with the greatest change being a 7.6 per cent reduction in people who identify with Australian ancestry and 3.5 per cent increase in people who identify with Chinese ancestry. The overall lack of diversity was regularly commented on during the interviews with comments such as;

> "We are probably still mainly Anglo-Saxon with smaller pockets of other ethnicities" (SCP).

"Having come from a school that had 64 different birth origins, it was striking how Anglo-Saxon this place was" (P).

"I would describe this school as Anglo-Saxon, very aussie. We do not have many international (students)" (LT1).

Table 5.4: Percentage of people that are connected to a particular ancestry group in the East Meadows College community versus Greater Melbourne Area (sourced from 2016 Census)

Ancestry	Area Surrounding East Meadows College (%)	Greater Melbourne Area (%)	% Change since 2006 for area surrounding East Meadows College
English	31.5	26.6	+1.0
Australian	29.2	24.0	-7.6
Chinese	11.1	7.9	+5.5
Irish	9.2	9.1	+1.1
Scottish	8.1	7.3	+0.9
Italian	4.9	6.7	0

5.4.3 Education Qualifications

Table 5.5 identifies the qualifications of the local area to provide a further insight into the community surrounding East Meadows College. It indicates that the local community is less qualified than across the greater Melbourne area, although the trend is demonstrating the area is becoming more qualified. This is reflected by the 8.4 per cent decrease in people having no qualifications compared with a decrease of 7.2 per cent across the greater Melbourne area in the 10 years between 2006 to 2016.

Table 5.5: Highest qualification achieved in the community surrounding East Meadows College compared to the Greater Melbourne Area (sourced from 2016 census).

Highest Qualification Achieved	Area Surrounding East Meadows College (%)	Greater Melbourne Area (%)	% Change since 2006 for area surrounding East Meadows College
Year 12 or equivalent qualification	55.0	59.4	+10.9
Bachelor or higher degree	22.3	27.5	+8.2
Do not hold any qualifications	40.5	38.6	-8.4

5.4.4 Staff Retention and Recruitment

Kate has faced the difficult task of refining her staff in proportion to the budget available for the number of students at the school. As Table 5.6 highlights, the student numbers have declined and the number of staff that can be supported by the school's budget has also been reduced considerably.

Over an 11 year period, the staff at East Meadows has reduced by half. This decline has had an impact on the remaining staff, particularly their feelings of job security. As a result, many experienced staff were made redundant or moved on of their own accord and a much younger, less experienced team remain at East Meadows. Under Kate, this team presented with great enthusiasm and motivation to do their job well. This was observed numerous times. Through the interview process, staff highlighted the positive aspects of being part of such a team.

> "Having a small school gives lots of opportunity to develop yourself as a leader, especially if you are prepared to work hard" (LT3).

> "I have been lucky to do leadership more quickly than I would have got elsewhere, through that I have been able to work closely with other leaders. As a small school, I get to see the leadership in all sections of the school" (LT3).

> "I think it is an antiquated notion of, "doing your time" before becoming a leader. That goes out the window here because you have the people who really want to do it are in the role. Whereas elsewhere, people who want the roles are having to do the time. Here we have youth and energy in these roles because of the number of opportunities and the number of staff" (LT3).

Although East Meadows College provides a great opportunity for young and upcoming educational leaders, this also creates the problem of retaining staff who are aspiring to more leadership. This is a consistent issue at the school;

> "Some of the challenges will be building up the level of the staff and retaining them. We know that there is such a shortage of retaining levels such as my Principal Class. I have already had some experience of losing that leadership" (P).

Having a small pool of staff to take on many leadership positions, can reduce the number of options the school can call on. Developing young staff to be better leaders can have its challenges;

Table 5.6: The number of students and full time equivalent staff employed at East Meadows College.

Year	Number of students	Number of full time equivalent teaching staff
2008	721	55
2009	682	53
2010	635	50
2011	568	46
2012	499	38
2013	450	34
2014	398	31
2015	346	30
2016	288	27
2017	236	29
2018	253	27

> "Because of the small school and the high number of young staff, we place some staff into leadership positions before they are ready. When we thrust people into these positions, sometimes their lack of experience can be telling in the way they handle situations" (LT2)

The opportunities or challenges will remain for some time yet. As the school looks to re-build its numbers and as long as its reputation continues to improve, there is much to look forward to for staff at East Meadows College;

> "As a destination school to attract staff, it is starting to happen. Numbers of applicants for jobs, because I sit on the interview panels, we see a difference in attracting numbers and the quality of the applicants. A little bit more of a destination place than it was, no one would come here four years ago. It was a dump and everyone in the system knew it was a dump" (LC).

5.5 School Vision

The school's vision is to be the "College of choice and to be respected by parents, community, tertiary providers and employers". This vision was articulated further by Kate;

> "I don't just see it as channelling students in and channelling them out on a one-way pathway. We know along the way they are coming out of it more employable because we have given them more authentic experiences to do that" (P).

Throughout the interview process, many of the participants referred to the first part of this vision, i.e. to be the "College of choice" (P, SCP, LT1, LT3, CL, BM, AP), and some made reference to the way they were achieving this vision and how it looked. Such statements included;

> "To be the College of choice. Kate is big on building the individual to contribute to the global community. It is very much about employability skills and what they can take from their schooling education and succeeding in post school life. That is why she is so big on collaborativeness, teamwork skills and communication skills, forming partnerships with external agencies" (LT3).

> "In comparison to other contexts, there is a lot of clarity about what we are here to do, be the College of choice. The work they did around the vision is quite significant in that respect. You hear that vision articulated regularly. It is not something just seen on the letterhead, it is part of the language of the school. I think there is a lot of clarity of how we are going to get there" (CL).

The development of this vision was done in conjunction with an overhaul of the values the school espoused and the accompanying logo. This rebranding of the school was an important part of the initial change process when Kate took on the principal role. The new school logo is a coloured star that is deliberately not encased in a border to symbolise the school does not want to limit each student's opportunity to develop their brilliance. Alongside the star is the acronym, 'INSPIRE', each letter representing a school value;

- Integrity
- Nurture
- Success
- Pride
- Innovation
- Respect
- Excellence

The word, 'Inspire', was used to further elaborate on the areas the school valued for a child's education, i.e. 'Inspiring brilliance' and 'Inspiring confidence'. These taglines are used to highlight the school's commitment to developing every child and valuing the differences

between students. The school's commitment to valuing difference is best demonstrated by the numerous pathways offered to students to aspire to university, TAFE or employment. Each avenue was valued equally and the school was working to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum, a vocational program and strong connections made with local businesses and organisations to support each of these pathways. The extensive connections made with business and organisations to enhance the student experience and demonstrate the value the school placed on vocational learning and developing employability skills are detailed later in this chapter. This commitment to supporting each individual to life beyond school was commented on by numerous staff throughout the interview process;

> "I think what Kate is trying to do is to ensure every child is "job-ready"" (PR).

> "Kate's focus on improving the school has allowed us that when we finish Year 12, we have lots of choice, universities, TAFE and many things we can do. We have people reaching out to us, such as external people" (S1).

Through developing a vision that engages all stakeholders, Kate is able to ensure there is a strong connection between the role each person has and the successful attainment of the vision statement. By selecting East Meadows as their secondary school or as the place of employment, students, parents and teachers are demonstrating their commitment to the vision. For the local businesses and organisations, their commitment to the vision happens because of the hard work and dedication of the staff to bring the vision to life. Given the number of connections East Meadows College has with their community, it is clear the local community is also beginning to see the school as the 'College of choice'.

5.6 School Performance

5.6.1 School Performance – NAPLAN

The information in Table 5.7 highlights that students in Year 9 at East Meadows College have performed with varying success against all government schools and like government schools since 2011. The most significant and consistent deficits can be found in all areas of the testing between 2011 and 2013, whereby all tests were marked as 'below' all other government schools except for Writing in 2013 ("well below" all other schools) and Grammar and Punctuation in 2013 ("at" levels of other schools).

Since 2014, the school has achieved greater success in the NAPLAN testing, with most being marked as "at" when comparing the achievement levels of the students at East Meadows College with students from all other schools. The exceptions to this included Numeracy in 2015,

Reading, Writing and Numeracy in 2017 and Reading in 2018, which recorded all student achievement levels "below" those of all other schools. In contrast, Writing, Reading, Grammar and Punctuation and Numeracy in 2014 and 2018, Reading in 2015 and 2016, as well as Grammar and Punctuation in 2016 and 2017 achieved "above" when comparing achievement with like schools.

Table 5.7: Year 9 NAPLAN results for East Meadows College.

Learning area		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Reading	Similar school								
	All schools								
Writing	Similar school								
	All schools								
Spelling	Similar school								
	All schools								
Grammar and Punctuation	Similar school								
	All schools								
Numeracy	Similar School								
	All Schools								

To look more closely at the achievement data of the students, the gain students have made from Year 7 to Year 9 can be monitored. The MySchool website offers graphs that allow for comparisons to schools with like students, i.e. students from schools with a similar ICSEA value or educational advantage. By looking at this growth data, it provides a stronger indicator of the value the school is adding to a student's academic attainment. As Kate did not start at East Meadows until late 2014, the gain graphs from 2015 to 2017 and 2016 to 2018 have been analysed.

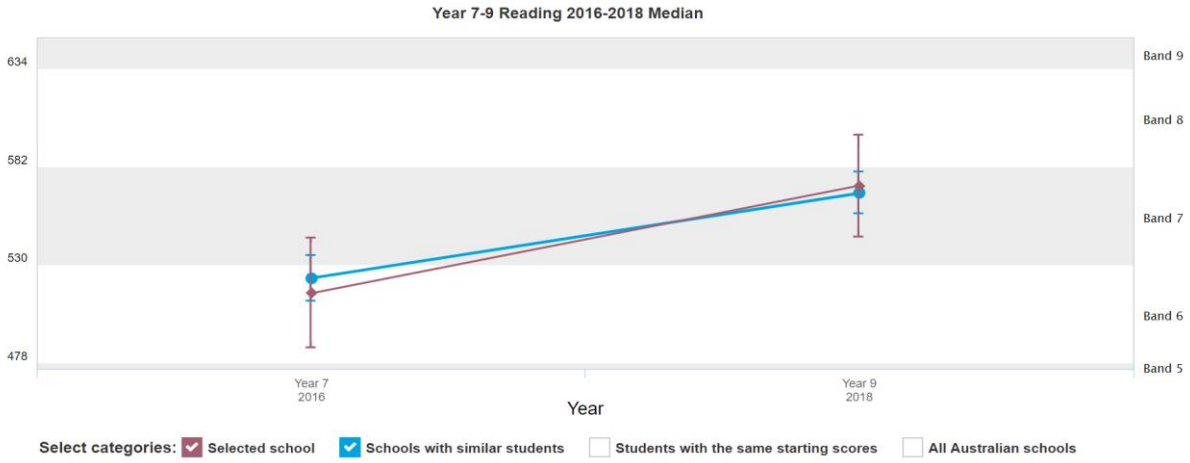


Figure 5.2: Gain in NAPLAN reading by Students at East Meadows College between 2016 and 2018.

The graph in Figure 5.2 looks at the growth students demonstrated between 2016 and 2018 on the NAPLAN Reading test. The students at East Meadows achieved a lower median score in 2016 than those attending schools with similar students; however, in 2018 the students at East Meadows had grown their median score to surpass those from schools with similar students. The same pattern, but with more significant growth by students at East Meadows, can be seen in Figure 5.3. This result highlight the Numeracy test of students in Year 7, 2016 to Year 9, 2018.

There were six NAPLAN Tests that were available to show the growth in students learning from Year 7 to Year 9 whilst under Kate's principalship. These were the Reading, Writing and Numeracy from each period, 2015 to 2017 and 2016 to 2018. Table 5.8 outlines how the gain in median achievement compared to schools with similar students.

Table 5.8: The median gain compared to schools with like students.

Test/ Year	2015-2017	2016-2018
Reading	About the same gain	Gain above
Writing	Gain slightly above	Gain above
Numeracy	Gain slightly below	Gain above

The statement of whether the cohort of students had achieved, "about the same gain", "gain slightly above" or "gain above" was made by reviewing the growth charts as shown in Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3

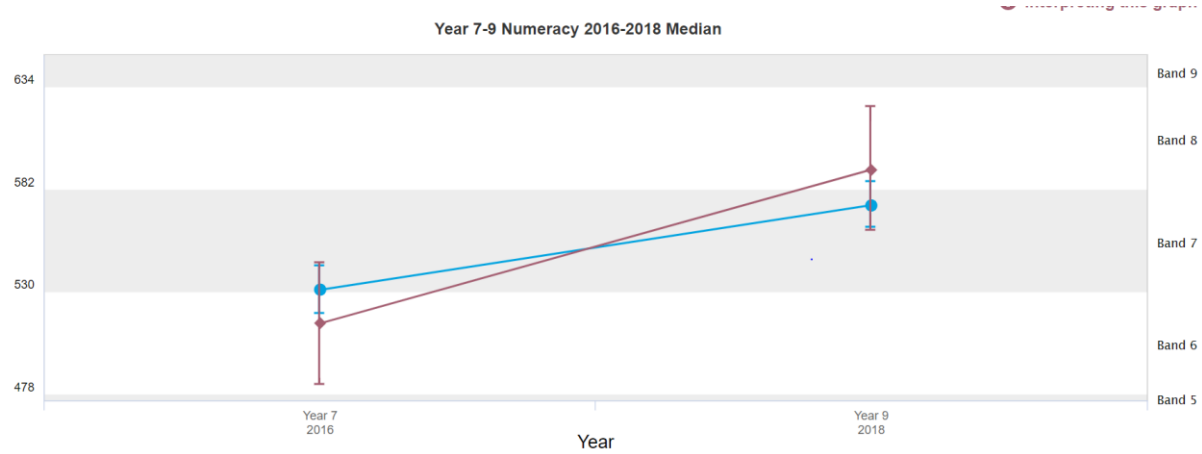


Figure 5.3: Gain in NAPLAN Numeracy by Students at East Meadows College between 2016 and 2018.

It is interesting to note the median gains from 2016 to 2018 are across each area. This could be attributed to the fact Kate had implemented many important learning interventions. Kate's priority when she arrived at East Meadows was to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum. As well as stronger written curriculum, Kate instilled higher expectations and a common pedagogy for all staff to develop. Each of these practices will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. With the 2016-2018 students enjoying the maturity of these practices, it seems that their learning is benefitting in terms of the gain they are demonstrating during NAPLAN testing. These practices and characteristics, along with others, will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

5.6.2 School Performance - Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE)

Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) median study score is an important measure of performance. As Figure 5.4 shows, the median study score for East Meadows College has fluctuated between 23 and 28 over the last 7 years. Whilst the average Year 12 median study score over Kate's tenure (2015 -2018 (at the time of writing)) is only 24.5, there was a notable improvement in 2018 with a median score of 28, and East Meadows was recognised as one of the most improved schools in Victoria based on VCE study scores. Whilst it is unknown if this improvement will continue, coupled with the gains made on the most recently publicised NAPLAN data, it would suggest that East Meadows is a school on an improvement journey.

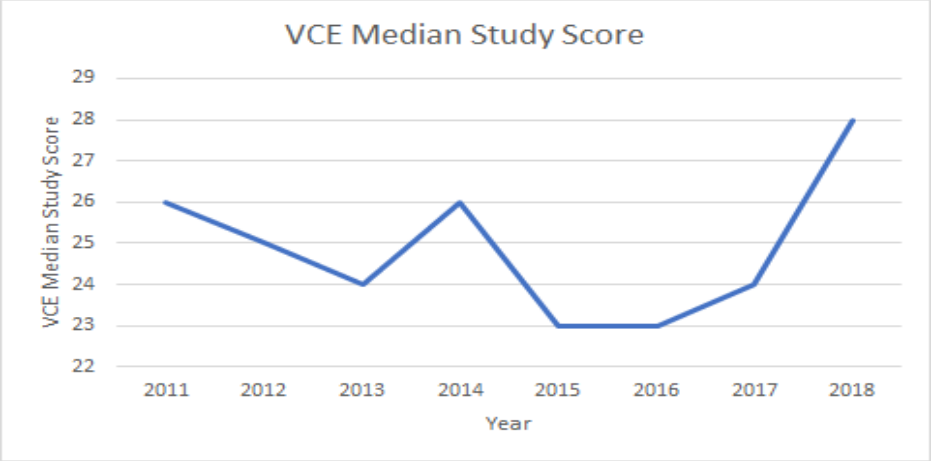


Figure 5.4: Year 12 median study score achieved at East Meadows College

5.7 Structure of Leadership

When Kate first arrived at East Meadows College, she was surprised by the fact that there was no curriculum leadership. This core element of education had no person or team that was ensuring consistency and cohesion in curriculum delivery. The fact Kate wanted to prioritise a guaranteed and viable curriculum, it was essential that she changed this structure. As well as adding roles to her team, Kate did identify the leadership team she inherited lacked the necessary capacity and drive to support the turnaround she knew was required. As such, she informed the two assistant principals at the time that there would be a restructure with only one assistant principal position being made available and that this position would be advertised to the wider education community to apply for.

This restructure included the development of the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) who would drive all the change that would take place at East Meadows College over the next few years. The SLT is made up of the following members of staff;

- Principal
- Assistant Principal
- Business Manager
- Head of Teaching and Learning and Literacy
- Heads of School (Junior and Senior), and
- Head of Data, Maths and Numeracy.

Figure 5.5 illustrates how each of these SLT members oversee their own team of teachers to drive improvement in specific areas of the school.

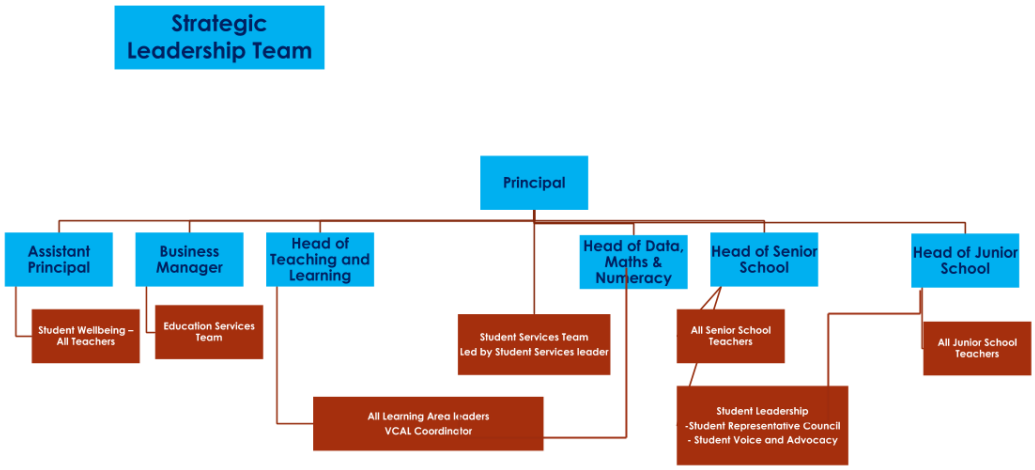


Figure 5.5: East Meadows College organisational chart

Figure 5.5 identifies the second tier of leadership Kate described as "genuinely distributed" because of the allocation of responsibilities to teams of teachers across the school, whose role is to address the key areas for school improvement. These teams are responsible for the following areas;

- The Teaching and Learning team are responsible for the development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum, inclusive of curriculum mapping, assessment and moderation.
- The Literacy and Data, Maths and Numeracy teams focus specifically on their particular learning area and help drive improvement through professional development, curriculum mapping and development of assessment tasks.
- The Student Services team, who report directly to the principal, ensure student wellbeing is maintained across all areas of schooling.
- The Heads of School lead each of their sub-schools to ensure exceptional pastoral care for their students and provide the overall leadership for staff working in their sub school.
- The Student Leadership Team meets regularly to discuss matters of importance to the student body and relay these issues to the principal. Those students who have not been elected by the student body in a formal capacity, can nominate themselves to be part of the Student Voice and Advocacy group. This group allows all students to voice their opinion on things important to them. This provides another avenue for students to feel connected and engaged at school and to give the students ownership over the changes that take place at their school. Each of the student teams have the same meeting

template that all groups use when they meet, including staff meetings, as well as agreed behaviours that they wish to develop over the course of a year, such as pride and respect.

The school distributes the responsibilities of school improvement to many members of its staff. This level of distribution ensures a collective ownership of the school improvement being undertaken. It also demonstrates the value placed on leadership. This is particularly highlighted by the fact that student leadership was not existent when Kate first took over. The development of this area has been significant over Kate's tenure and the practice of student leadership was observed many times during this case study. Examples included the school captains leading assembly, Student Representatives from the vocational course sharing their fundraising initiative with the school community and the students who are on "environment duty" to clean up around the school. Such student centred actions demonstrate how the students were able to take greater responsibility for their learning and the running of the school.

The SLT has a weekly meeting that ran for two and a half hours. This was a priority for Kate and never missed. She identified the SLT as the group that would drive change and they required her support and the support of each other to ensure this would happen. Her commitment to this meeting was noted by one of the SLT members;

> "Every single week she has the leadership meeting, even though I beg her to miss it sometimes. But every week we have our leadership meeting. We are all on time. You have to be on time. There are minutes, there are agendas. Everything is recorded. You are always given opportunities, and encouraged, to report on things yourself. It is not just about her, she includes every single leader to have their say and opinion. We often work together. There might be something she wants us to work on together, like some data or some other report. She includes us all" (BM)

Through an observation of the SLT, it was clear they were comfortable presenting their opinion and ideas and that the group was open to feedback on work they had documented. Each member voiced a question or statement and these were all addressed in an open and respectful manner.

5.8 Principal Practices

This section identifies the themes highlighted through the interviews to explain how Kate's practices as principal have influenced the culture and performance of the school and led to greater success.

Kate drew from her rich educational experiences, including guidance from mentors, to enact her practices with much thought. As her experience grew in the principal role so too did her openness to consult more widely on practices implemented. This section outlines what those practices were and how they were perceived and endorsed by the wider school community to support the transformation of East Meadows. Table 5.9 identifies the strongest themes attained from the research process and the number of times those interviewed commented on the principal demonstrating these practices. These themes will be discussed further below.

Table 5.9: Number of interview comments attributed to Principal practices themes.

Theme	P	AP	CL	BM	LC	SCP	LT1	LT2	LT3	S1	S2	PR	Total
Creating an orderly environment	50	23	5	30	8	16	12	12	9	28	28	13	234
Collaborative practices	70	25	20	21	7	11	25	3	17	3	0	2	204
Vision/Direction Setting	50	19	14	13	11	29	33	16	4	8	4	10	211
Networking with and connecting to the community	63	23	4	16	13	33	8	1	9	5	6	7	188
Developing the teaching and learning	56	29	19	7	9	7	21	12	13	4	9	7	193

5.8.1 Creating an orderly environment

During the interviews with participants, the most commonly discussed pre-condition of the school prior to Kate's arrival was that East Meadows College was an unsafe and disorderly school. Participants described the school as being "rough and in disrepair" (BM, LT2), having a "lack of order", "bad language being used" (P), "there was graffiti and overgrown gardens" (LT1) and "it was a difficult environment to teach in" (LT2). As such, the school had a bad reputation and its enrolments had declined every year from 2008 until 2017. The decline over this period saw enrolments drop from 721 to 236 students. It was clear something was not right.

Kate had a number of issues to attend to. Her approach was to create an orderly environment with an emphasis on inclusivity and student centred practices.

Staff had developed habits of not beginning class in a timely fashion, which gave reason to the students to arrive later and later. Students lacked pride in their school, which was observed in

the way they wore their uniform; often mismatched with casual clothing and they were not held to account for this. Students attending East Meadows experienced large number of suspensions.

Table 5.10: Number of suspended days issued to students at East Meadows College

Year	Number of suspended days issued to students
2010	246
2011	225
2012	213
Kate appointed as Executive Principal in October 2014.	
2016	60
2017	49
2018 (until 1st June)	10

Comparing the period prior to Kate's appointment as Executive Principal with the period following, suspensions have reduced dramatically.

From the very beginning Kate knew an orderly environment was essential for everything else that would follow. She called on the local government member to help her gather a group of people for a working bee, an event to help clean the school. This event attracted 400 people and enabled the school to make a significant difference to the way it presented itself; fences were painted, weeding of garden beds and removal of trip hazards. Immediately following the event, Kate received numerous calls and comments from the local community on the new look of the school.

Initially, Kate's focus was on students turning up to class on time, lining up in an orderly fashion before entering the classroom and demonstrating respectful behaviours. To ensure students presented to class on time, the consequence of a Saturday detention was enforced for any student who received three late attendance passes in a week. Supporting this process and other actions to engage and include students came the development of a 'Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Inclusion Policy' and the 'Code of Conduct Policy'. These documents were being created to ensure that every member of the community understood their role and the responsibilities they had at school. These documents outlined what behaviour was expected of staff and students, how the school proactively worked with the community to develop these behaviours and what the response would be in the event a student or staff member contravened these expectations. With these expectations clearly documented, a shared understanding was gained and students, staff and parents aligned with these, creating a calmer

and more orderly environment. Such an environment promoted greater student engagement and action. This orderly environment was recognised throughout the interview process;

> "I enjoy coming to school because it is a good environment. Everyone in Year 9 gets along" (S1)

> "My older sister was here during the previous principal. The uniform was not as enforced. Now that Kate is here, the uniform is looking good and the rules are strict but fair" (S1)

> "Some of the other changes I have seen here are when I used to walk past the '200' block, I used to have to go back and get the principal to say there was a class out of control in Room 201 or 204. But now when you walk past there, the students are seated doing their work. I hadn't seen that ever" (BM).

Kate was aware that many staff had worked in this "disorderly" environment for many years and were not aware what a good learning environment looked like. The orderly entry into the classroom was part of the school developing its own instructional model "that would bring together what (it) teaches and how (staff) teach to raise student outcomes" (East Meadows Secondary College, 2018, np). Kate sent her staff to other schools to observe what good learning environments look like. She carefully considered the schools selected for her staff to observe, ensuring the demographic of the student population reflected those at East Meadows College. The staff ventured out to these schools as part of an action research process to consider what was possible and what needed to change at their own school.

As the school developed a shared understanding of expectations of behaviour, the school undertook one of its most significant changes, that of changing the student uniform. This very visual change was just as much symbolic, as it was strategic, to demonstrate to the students, parents and the wider community things were changing at East Meadows College. The key to the students wearing the uniform was engaging them in the process of its design. Kate also saw this as a way the school could market itself to attract new students to the school. She knew if she got the uniform right, that would send a message to the community and enhance the perception of the school, which would begin to influence enrolment numbers. The change from within the school was immediate as noted by one of the staff members;

> "I noticed within the first month. I went outside to get the mail. I noticed all the kids were in uniform. They had the right colour socks and the right type of shoes. It was quite bizarre because I had never seen that before" (BM)

As a result of the change in the school environment from one of disorder to order, it has highlighted and supported other practices evident at East Meadows College; its inclusivity and the student centred practices. These two practices will now be described in greater detail.

5.8.1.1 Inclusive Practices

In her attempt to turn the school around, Kate knew she needed to involve the community every step of the way. This was apparent immediately she arrived when she used the support of the local member of parliament to invite the community to help clean up the school's grounds. As discussed earlier, Kate also prioritised her teachers to observe practices at other like schools and involved the students in the design of the school uniform. Each of these actions engaged different groups in ways that have enabled them to invest in the future success of East Meadows College. Kate has also integrated inclusive practices into the vision, values and daily running of the school. The school vision includes a shared responsibility with all teachers of improving practice through their individual commitment and through their support of one another.

Through providing a school that offers both the academically focussed VCE, and the vocationally focussed Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), Kate attracts students from all backgrounds and interests to create a diverse community of learners. This diversity was highlighted during one of the interviews with a group of students;

> "It is good to have something different and mix with different people" and,
>
> "It is good to be part of a school where there are people from different backgrounds, cultures and different to the stereotypical teenager"(S1).

The parent representative interviewed also highlighted the inclusive practices of alternate pathways and identified the opportunity the school was exploring in regard to issuing a Middle School certificate for those not continuing their studies, something that appealed to families;

> "One of the other reasons we chose this school is they offer VCAL and VET as well. The school has a lot to offer in that aspect and recognising that not every child wants to do VCE" (PR).
>
> "There are some students who cannot achieve Year 11 and Year 12, so to offer a certificate to recognise that level of success is good" (PR).

These observations by students and parents highlight the importance of offering alternate pathways to students, demonstrating that success can look different for every student. This differentiated approach was often referred to by Kate;

> "Student achievement to me is not just about the end result, the ATAR score, it's not about having so many students in the top ranks, it's actually about the growth, the growth in the students. I made it very clear from the word go, it's not just about the school, it's about making sure we have students that have a positive attitude, willing to learn and all those things. It's about those employability skills. You can't just look at the ATAR scores, you must also look at the VET awards (As well). Achievement is the journey you take to get to your goal" (P).

Kate was a strong advocate for the education of the whole child. As stated in the school's Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Inclusion policy (East Meadows SC, 2018, n.p.), East Meadows aims "to develop all students individually, not only academically, but as a whole person contributing positively as a member of our community, ready to participate in the wider society." She referred to this as 'PIES', the physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of students. At East Meadows this involved the Student Services team which, as discussed earlier, is overseen by Kate to develop a case management process involving key staff to meet the holistic needs of the students identified. This was a clear example of moving beyond a purely academic focus. Having said that, Kate was adamant she needed to move away from the perception the school was a welfare focused school and find the right holistic approach. By developing the whole child, Kate believes the students are happier and demonstrate greater pride in their school;

> "By having the whole school focussed on the same goal, it means they are a lot happier. You probably found that when you spoke to the students as they have great pride in the school and want to do well; whereas before, they couldn't have cared less" (P).

Kate's approach to supporting the whole person is not lost on the students either. During one of the interviews with students, they acknowledged her supportive nature;

> "She gives support when needed. She recognises that it is not just about the working environment, it is about their physical and mental health and family's health. She recognises that family comes first and says that is the case. Full support. Not just within the school but outside of school as well" (S2).

It is clear that Kate's holistic approach to wellbeing extends across the whole school community.

5.8.1.2 Student Centred Practices

During the first term of Kate's arrival, she re-introduced student leadership opportunities to the school, which had not been available for the previous six years. This simple act was symbolic of the emphasis Kate placed on empowering students to ensure greater engagement and a stronger connection to their school. Kate knew it would support the creation of an orderly environment as the students would have great ownership of decisions and feel a deeper sense of responsibility for the success of the school. This emphasis on developing a student voice within the school through student leadership and student centred practices was observed in a number of ways whilst visiting East Meadows. These included;

- Student leaders hosting the school assembly, leading discussion, introducing special visitors and entertaining the audience,
- Students choosing whether they receive explicit instruction from a teacher, a chance to collaborate with a peer or work independently,
- Students running Student Representative Council (SRC) meetings during a lunchtime to discuss issues important to the student body, as well as entertain ways they could recruit more students to help promote their messages,
- Students assigned roles to help keep the environment tidy and organised.

There are many examples of student voice at East Meadows but probably the most profound is the students' involvement in the AMPLIFY Model (Appendix B), which was also referred to as the "teach the teacher" program. Drawn from a government initiative, this program gives students a powerful voice in their learning, whereby they provide feedback to their teacher. Teachers will then analyse this data to identify a goal for their teaching practice, implement a set of agreed actions and finally reflect on the level of success they have experienced. Such input from students into the teaching and learning at the school resonated with the students;

> "I felt like we were really connected to the teachers and what is happening in the school. They were able to see our point of view. We would say what we felt like and it was like we were working together to get the best out of the school" (S1).

By including students in the development of the teaching and learning experiences, the students better understand the role and responsibility they have as the learner. This was particularly highlighted by one student group who observed;

> "When an idea comes to the Student Representative Council (SRC), they work through what could work and what couldn't work, they will then present to the principal and meet half way so it still satisfies what the students are asking for but is appropriate for the school to support" (S2).

Such collaboration enables greater engagement, which in turn supports a more orderly environment. Kate has ensured the orderly environment at East Meadows College enhances inclusivity and the promotion of student voice, which in turn, supports the environment that enhances good teaching and learning.

5.8.2 Collaborative Practices

Collaboration has been a key approach at East Meadows College to support school improvement. From an analysis of the transcripts of all the participants and observations of practice, there are three main ways collaboration took place;

- To ensure key decision making has considered all perspectives, including the students', before a decision has been made
- To develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum and consistent teaching practices across the school
- To utilise the expertise in the community to advance the improvement of the school

By supporting each aspect of collaboration in the school, Kate was able to build the capacity of her staff to meet the expectations set by the school, advance the rigour of the programs offered and ensure the community felt ownership for key decisions.

5.8.2.1 Collaboration and key decision making

Despite Kate being identified as autocratic on numerous occasions (LC, P, CL, LT2), she knew that a collaborative approach was essential when the decisions made would have a far-reaching effect. This was the case when there was a decision to change the school uniform.

> "When I was going to get the kids to wear the uniform, and the whole school looking good that (engage with students) was the key thing. I thought if I'm going to get new enrolments, I've got to get the right perception out there. I engaged students, staff, parents and the broader community" (P).

> "Even with the school uniform, she had parents and students in on that. She wanted them involved because the students are the ones who will wear it and the parents are the ones who will buy it" (BM).

By involving the students and parents in this process, it helped generate more support for the change and resulted in less resistance because of the collaborative approach taken.

This collaborative approach to decision making was also apparent with staff when addressing the need to raise achievement levels. When the VCE review was undertaken, Kate needed to approach this collaboratively to get the best result and to ensure staff owned the decisions that were made;

> "Where I want to have staff input and major decisions made where staff own it, we use the project team model where staff nominate representatives that they would like to see on the project. Ultimately, they nominate the right people for it and they own and drive the decision" (P).

Kate also has a staff and student consultative committee. She meets with this group on a regular basis to gain an insight into the things that are a priority for staff and students alike. This enables her to keep abreast of concerns and value the student and staff voice.

> "I have seen an increase of want for student voice over the years. Kate and the teachers care a lot about student voice. They want to hear what the students have to say, which is good" (S2)

When difficult decisions needed to be made and were not considered appropriate to collaborate on, Kate would sometimes draw on the experience of her leadership coach. This would enable her to talk through decisions with someone who may have experienced something similar before but was not heavily invested in the outcome of the decision. The role of the leadership coach was multi-faceted, as described by the coach;

> "It is as much about unloading burden as it is about strategic advice. She probes me with questions from my experience. She has just met with me to share a dilemma she has and she is needing to have a difficult conversation, so we have talked about that" (LC).

Kate ultimately decides on what decisions require a collaborative approach and those that are to be made by her as Principal of East Meadows College.

5.8.2.2 Collaboration and Teaching

When Kate arrived at East Meadows College, there was no coherent and explicit curriculum, nor was there a shared understanding of pedagogy. Staff were left to their own devices and there was no continuity or consistency in how the curriculum was delivered. As such, Kate

recognised the urgency with which this needed to change and saw an opportunity to make a defining statement that would demonstrate her desire for teachers to work collaboratively. Kate reorganised office spaces so that teachers were placed in faculty groups, as opposed to friendship groups. Moving beyond the resistance that was caused by this decision, Kate was able to focus on developing curriculum design teams, which were teams of teachers from the same faculty group that worked together to create the curriculum. Their first task was to identify the key terms (vocabulary) and skills the students would need to develop by Year 12, and break these down to create year level benchmarks.

> "Teachers work together to ensure what I do in Year 10 flows into what is required of the students at Year 11 and Year 12. We ensure consistency through a common language and common tasks. We are aiming to sequence the skills required to support the students. Being a small school enhances the opportunity to be collaborative and develop a community atmosphere. We hope that this leads to greater student growth" (LT1).

Whilst this essential scope and sequence was being developed, Kate was keen to ensure there was accountability in its delivery. She was adamant that team teaching was the best way to move forward to ensure greater differentiation of the curriculum and provide flexibility within the learning spaces for teachers to accommodate the needs of their students. The Instructional Model for East Meadows College was created to make this explicit and this identified key aspects such as team teaching and the approach of 'A third, A third, A third' model. This approach ensures students learn in different ways, such as via direct instruction, independent learning and collaborative learning for different amounts of time for each lesson.

> "By having the teacher teams and the 'A third, a third, a third' model, we have been able to differentiate and personalise the learning for everyone. We are looking at every student's point of need so that everyone can achieve" (P).

> "For Maths it enables us to differentiate more so we can cater at the point of need for all students. It is nice to have another teacher in the classroom to bounce the ideas across the other teacher and students. The in-built relationship strengthens the curriculum because it is a shared responsibility. It enables you to develop your skills by working alongside another teacher. Team teaching also improves teacher practice and student learning. Everyone learns from each other. Everyone is accountable because the team teaching would suffer if not everyone knew what was being taught" (LT1).

This collaborative approach to teaching and planning has been a key ingredient of success for East Meadows in fast tracking the school's improvement. Teachers have aligned their thinking and teaching to ensure the greatest benefactors are the students.

To enhance the standard of teaching, East Meadows has also incorporated peer observations into the professional development program. This approach to identifying and improving an area of practice through conversations with, and observations by colleagues, is a powerful collaborative way of ensuring sustained school improvement. East Meadows strategic plan (2015-2018) outlined its commitment to this type of professional development that provided teachers with feedback to build their capacity.

5.8.2.3 Collaboration and community partnerships

Kate is a strong networker; she uses her contacts to benefit the students at her school. There were two pertinent collaborations that catapulted the school forward on their improvement journey, they were;

- Collaboration with other local secondary schools to identify what an orderly environment and good teaching practice can look like, and
- Collaboration with the local primary schools to develop a shared understanding of literacy and numeracy skills required when entering secondary school.

Kate wanted to ensure students were set up for success in their learning by creating a safe, orderly environment and a strong instructional model However, some staff who had taught at the school for many years had become accustomed to the current climate. Kate set up action research teams to observe the practice and environment at other schools with the aim that some of these could be used as a starting point at East Meadows College;

> "We had professional development about what a good environment looks like because they didn't know what a good environment looked like. They hadn't been to other schools" (P1).

Kate created the Action Research teams who visited other secondary schools armed with questions so that they could then frame their own expectations for East Meadows. This collaboration within and between schools highlighted the value Kate placed on teachers working together to define the environment they wanted to work in. She used her connections to provide staff an opportunity to look beyond what they had become accustomed to so they could see what was possible.

As well as creating the right environment for learning at East Meadows, there was anecdotal evidence to suggest students were entering secondary school underprepared by their primary school;

> "We are getting kids that are well below the standard and getting them up to state average by Year 9" (P)

To alleviate this, East Meadows set up opportunities with the local primary schools to enhance the transition of students from primary to secondary school. This partnership was another way to promote the strength of teachers at East Meadows, enhancing the reputation the school had and, hopefully lead to further enrolments. Most importantly, this collaboration set up agreed literacy and numeracy targets that will support the continued success of every child from primary to secondary school;

> "We have been doing a moderation program with the teachers to support transition. Not just about transition information but about literacy and numeracy targets that our local areas have put in place" (AP)

Kate has utilised collaboration to build the capacity of her staff to know what can be expected of school teachers in a secondary setting, develop pedagogy and set agreed targets with the primary school about literacy and numeracy, improve relationships within and between schools and enhance the reputation of the College in the local community.

5.8.3 Developed a Clear Vision

When Kate arrived at East Meadows, the school had a bad reputation and it was perceived as a poor school. Rebranding the school was essential for the local community to notice the changes. To provide the urgency for the change, Kate ordered a priority review for the school from the DET, which would provide the information she needed as a catalyst for change moving forward;

> "As stressful and constant as the review was, it helped provide a clear vision of where we would like to be in four years time. That was great for us because we were not aware of the issues and why there needed to be a priority review" (LT1).

Kate often remarked that East Meadows College was to become the 'College of Choice'. As outlined earlier in this chapter, this short catchphrase captured the vision that the community was working towards and echoed throughout the participants' interviews. When elaborated, the vision states, "East Meadows College is to be the College of choice and to be respected by parents, community, tertiary providers and employers".

> "We created a new vision and values. Ours actually spell 'inspire' and that led to the logo saying 'inspiring brilliance'. It's visible. It's in the rooms. Everybody owns it" (P).

Along with creating the vision, Kate was renowned for communicating it at every opportunity with the community. This attracted prospective parents (including the current School Council President) and also impressed the leading teachers;

> "Having someone like Kate who has been in a high performing context, she understands what an effective school looks like, so I think she has a really strong vision in that regard and she is pretty relentless in communicating that vision" (CL).

In combination with the school's vision, Kate drew inspiration from her own experiences at school to ensure her students were given every opportunity to succeed. East Meadows needed to nurture a positive culture that promoted improvement and students doing their best. Drawing from her experience, Kate knew she just needed to get the students to believe anything was possible;

> "I went to a challenging school and that's where I really saw that it doesn't matter what your background is, you can do well. That's when I thought, don't tell me kids can't get there, they can. I thought, you give kids time, no matter what their background, they can achieve" (P)

This determination is a reflection of Kate as a principal and person, and epitomises her priority of putting the student first every time. This is not lost on her students who commented on her caring, approachable nature but also on her want for all the students to achieve;

> "She wants you to do your best and she emphasises that only you know your best. She always says, "Don't say you can't, you can, you just have to find another way around it"" (S1).

To create this positive culture and growth mindset, Kate knew it would require her to lead by example and ensure the vision was at the forefront of the school's thinking all the time;

> "I have developed as a leader by bringing the vision into reality. I knew if I had the belief then the community could get the belief. I had the belief that this area is a good area and the demographics were showing that the students weren't achieving and there wasn't an absolute reason for it" (P).

The positive culture was a strong theme throughout, whereby the school had become a place of opportunity and excitement, bringing the vision to life;

> "The community want us to be the school of choice. They want to be a part of this. You see the culture just around the area. The kids are in their uniforms and they show respect to everyone else. The culture in here has really shifted to where we want kids to go these days" (SCP).

> "Kate is always trying to make something better or introducing something new. She just doesn't stop. She really wants to make this the school of choice. Now people are choosing it" (BM).

However, Kate knew that not all staff would want to travel the journey she was embarking on. Communicating the vision in such a relentless manner would mean teachers were hearing a consistent message that some would not necessarily want to support. Kate was not afraid to have the difficult conversations with staff;

> "There have been some that have really come on and accepted all of the challenges. I said that I am more than happy to help you get another job if you do not like the direction that this school is going in. Some of them did move on to new jobs" (P).

The positivity was evident throughout the interviews, with all participants demonstrating a focus on growth and improvement;

> "Our role in achieving this vision is to provide high expectations of the students and reinforce their belief in what they can achieve" (LT1).

With all stakeholders understanding and believing in the vision, the community of East Meadows College are well placed to continue the trajectory of improvement they have enjoyed in the last couple of years.

5.8.4 Networking – Connecting to community

Connecting to the community was an essential part of Kate's approach in turning around the school. In fact, she was well known for her ability to network and connect. Kate's leadership coach commented;

> "Kate gets a lot of what she wants and gets a lot more than what other schools get. She is well connected. I think they are things that she needs to teach other people the value of. By connections, I mean partnership connections that are served by

> your community and those agencies. Kate is also connected well throughout the system (department)" (LC).

Much of the school's decline is evident in its enrolments which can be attributed to its failing reputation. There were some significant changes beyond enhancing the school's reputation that Kate embarked upon to improve the trajectory of the school. The connections made were significant in different ways and the partnerships were formed to enhance;

- The learning experience for the students
- The reputation and/or perception of the school
- The capacity of the staff

Kate has always made decisions based on what is best for the students. This primary driver motivated her to do what she is good at, build relationships with organisations or businesses that will offer an enhanced learning experience for the students of East Meadows.

There are numerous examples of these experiences, some would be a single experience, others would lead towards an ongoing partnership. Even the single experiences were initiated with the idea of the long term effect they could have;

> "We also have lots of guest speakers that she (Kate) brings into the school to help with study skills. She has actually brought that into the younger years, which is a great idea to help the younger students learn how to study before they get to the higher classes" (BM).

Kate's desire to partner with local businesses and organisations was drawn from her own industry experience. She was adamant schools needed to be connected with the community for the benefit of its students;

> "Schools can't be silos any more. I get a bit frustrated that school networks are very good at challenging each other, but you also need links with the outside world to challenge you more. Business and industry links are the only way to do this. You cannot become insular" (P).

With this in mind, Kate forged many strong partnerships including;

- Students hosting a symposium about the future of their local community based around the strategic plan of the local council. The students engaged in reviewing and critiquing the plan, before developing some of their own ideas for the future of the community. Occurring over many weeks, the students then invited local members of parliament and the local council for the presentation of their findings and recommendations.
- Students undertaking community service with a local aged care facility
- A variety of business and local organisation partnering with the school to support students undertaking the VCAL program, including the Melbourne Fire Brigade to complete a fire certificate in public safety
- A connection with Rotary who sponsor some families who may require financial support. They offer a public speaking course for students and are developing an ongoing international project that looks at improving the local community by making global connections . In return, students volunteer at numerous Rotary events
- The local Innovation, Opportunity and Sustainability Centre, which develops students' understandings of creating a sustainable future. The students attend this centre as part of their Science program.

As well as developing students' engagement, skills and understanding, Kate drew on her network through the education department and local organisations to develop staff capacity. These experiences included;

- Inviting a curriculum writing expert to help shape the guaranteed and viable curriculum that was required to be developed.
- To support the school's aim for greater student voice and advocacy, as well as developing feedback on teachers' pedagogy, the school engaging with Australian Council for Educational Research to develop surveys for students to complete.
- An ongoing opportunity for staff to attend the Bastow Institute leadership courses and use their leadership coaches to mentor staff at school.

There was a strong emphasis placed on partnerships to develop students and staff and these were also opportunities to change people's perceptions of East Meadows. One of East Meadows challenges is its location. Not being situated on a main road results in it not being seen or known by people beyond the immediate surrounds. This challenge was highlighted by a member of the leadership team;

> "I understand that the reputation of the school was not great. I live one suburb across and I didn't even know that there was a school here. I needed my Google maps to find it" (AP).

The need to promote the school further was essential and Kate, as the leader of East Meadows was the ideal person to take on this role;

> "Kate is fantastic at publicity. Not just in the local area, but she will put the school out there on any type of stage she can get it to. Obviously, the local papers and educational reports she is willing to put herself out there. Any opportunity we have to publicise the school Kate will be all over it" (AP)

Each partnership publicised the school to a new section of the community. The school had experienced bad publicity about incidents involving their students and this had impacted enrolments over the preceding years;

> "Our challenge is in keeping the community's confidence when the reputation was so bad. We have got no enrolments from our closest primary school for a number of years until this year" (P).

Kate was acutely aware of the need for the school to change its image and promote student experiences at East Meadows College. Her strategies included;

- Hiring a marketing specialist to develop the vision and values material for the school
- Connecting to local primary schools to change the perception local families had about the school. These included;
    - Attending assemblies and promoting the possibilities at East Meadows,
    - Sending students from East Meadows to work with the primary school students,
    - The development of a Junior Excellence Tuition (JET) program, which is a problem solving extension course and runs over six weeks for Year 4 and Year 5 students from local primary schools
    - The development of strong transition programs
- Inviting the local Real Estate agents to tour East Meadows College. As a result, the school is now listed on the advertisements for houses being sold, highlighting the house is in the "East Meadows zone"

- Participating in a Principal for a Day program, which is an opportunity for a high profile member of the community to shadow the principal and participate in normal day-to-day activities in the school. One participant was the main newsreader for a local television channel and East Meadows was highlighted during that evening's bulletin news.

Kate's strategy of connecting to external experts to the school, whether it be for the benefit of students, staff or to enhance the image of the school, was a bold, essential move. She used her confidence in building connections to her advantage and called on her existing network, as well as networking further to enrich the school community and look to guarantee future success for the school. Her efforts were having an effect on the students, as noted by one of the Year 12 students;

> "The reputation of the school is a lot higher now. Before, I did not put the school I attended on my resume because I just didn't want my employer knowing I came from a school that was troubled or had a bad reputation, but now it is at the top. It is something I am more proud of, where the school is now, to where it was before. Everyone would tell me to put my school down, but I didn't want anyone knowing I came from here but now it is up the top all the time" (S2).

5.8.5 Developing the Teaching and Learning

The lack of written curriculum for new staff when they arrived at East Meadows prior to 2015 was a shock to many.

> "Prior to Kate arriving, the curriculum was loose. Some staff who have been here for a while say there was curriculum there, but there was no centralised location for that curriculum. When a staff member left, they took the curriculum with them" (AP).

The teaching and learning was a priority for Kate and a strong focus was placed on developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum, implementing an instructional model and developing team teaching to support differentiation.

5.8.5.1 Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum

Kate immediately moved to ensure a guaranteed and viable curriculum was centralised and that staff had greater support and accountability for curriculum delivery. Kate shuffled office spaces so that teachers were in faculty groups, enabling formal and informal conversations around curriculum development. The school supported faculty planning for staff by releasing

them for a day each term to plan what they were going to teach. This opportunity for collaboration was a strong sign to staff of the direction the school would take to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum. In addition to these days, staff had a meeting schedule where further planning and reflecting on their program took place. The guaranteed and viable curriculum was a document that required ongoing reflection, modification and development.

> "Now we are to the point, four years later, where every single unit is documented. Teachers work in teams; they plan, they teach, they reflect, they go back and now the teaching is all completely documented" (P).

To reach this outcome, support was given to the teaching staff, with the example of professional practice days at the beginning of the term. These opportunities for staff to work with their colleagues were greatly appreciated. It was made very clear what these days were planned to achieve;

> "The professional practice days have helped give time to staff to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum. You are working with your team and specifically focussed on the curriculum and process of learning, ensuring growth in our students" (LT1).

As well as being an essential component to an effective school, the guaranteed and viable curriculum was a great asset to share with parents to build confidence in knowing that their child was attending an effective school. This level of transparency provided more opportunities for the parents to be actively involved in their child's school experiences;

> "Kate brought in a new learning management system. You could see what your kids are doing every day. That was very helpful" (PR).

5.8.5.2 Instructional Model

Once the teachers collaboratively created a curriculum plan, Kate needed to build the capacity of staff in knowing how the curriculum was to be taught; a common pedagogy. Kate had a clear view of how she believed the curriculum needed to be delivered but wanted staff to invest time and research into what would work in their setting;

> "We did an action research paper. I thought if I come up with an instructional model it is not going to work, so I needed them to come up with the instructional model. I didn't give it to them, I guided them to it. I put the rationale behind it and scoped it for them to research" (P).

As discussed in the collaboration section of this chapter, the teachers went to other schools to observe the environment and teacher practice. The aim of this action research was;

> "To conduct an investigation in schools to identify strategies for improving teacher practice which could be incorporated into an agreed 'East Meadows College Instructional Model' that could be used to improve student outcomes" (East Meadows College, 2018)

The school now has an instructional model that is the foundation on which the teaching is based. This instructional model has been collaboratively developed and refined and is published in a manual that is shared with all teachers, particularly those being inducted at the school, and parents. The instructional model is a detailed overview of how to engage, deliver and review one's teaching. It includes supporting resources such as rubrics and graphic organisers to reflect on teaching and information about the different elements of the instructional model (East Meadows, 2018).

To continually develop the teachers' pedagogy, the staff at East Meadows College seek feedback in two distinct ways. The staff form triads, whereby each of the three staff are involved in a number of prescribed steps. These include;

- A pre-observation discussion to discuss the focus of the observation,
- An observation of teaching practice and
- A post-observation discussion that provides feedback on the identified focus.

The process is documented and formalised and enables the staff to engage in effective professional dialogue;

> "I sit down with a teacher and discuss what areas they wish to improve. They reflect on their practice. Then we do observations and then we have a lot of discussions using coaching questions and getting the teacher to reflect and celebrate" (LT1).

The opportunity to gain feedback on teaching practice is also sought from the students. As discussed during the 'Student Centred Practices' section earlier in this chapter, the students are an integral part of the AMPLIFY Model. Kate has wanted this process to be very collaborative and for students to know they have a voice;

> "We have also come up with a model that we have worked on with ACER to use student voice and advocacy in the classroom. The students are actually seeing their voices being heard and they can impact on how they are learning. Students have given feedback when a teacher may have gone too quickly on a given topic, so the

> teacher has received that and then adjusted. Where a teacher may not agree with the student feedback, they then work towards a medium point to meet the students" (P).

The instructional model provided the staff with key features that would enhance their teaching. Although differentiation and personalisation were two key features that were frequently identified throughout the interview process, it was clear these had been a priority for the teachers to develop and were visible for the students to know they were a key part of their engagement in learning.

For the teachers to differentiate, pre-testing was essential. This was most notable in English and Mathematics subjects, as the school needed to focus on these core skills to enhance the learning across all areas.

> "We pre-test all of the Grade 6 students coming in so we can identify and do early intervention to help the students" (P).

This approach ensures teachers can address the needs within each cohort in the most effective way;

> "We do pre-testing to see where the students are at. No point teaching kids stuff they already know. Find out which of these kids need to know a little more, which students need to know the basic level and teach to the students you have in your class. Not just develop a "cookie-cutter" pedagogy in your class. Identify the group of students you have now and think about what you are going to teach" (AP).

By doing this, the students are gaining a more personalised learning experience and they are aware this is happening;

> "When a student is cruising in a subject, the teacher will challenge them rather than let them drift off. There are lots of chances to have the one-on-one time with the teacher and form a relationship so they know exactly what we need" (S2).

5.8.5.3 Team teaching

To support the ability to differentiate and personalise, teachers in Year 7 to 9 deliver a number of subjects as a team. This team teaching approach means there are two teachers in the room to deliver curriculum and support learning. The presence of multiple teachers provides flexibility in how the class is organised and enables the staff to make decisions on who delivers what content, which could be decided by the experience and depth of understanding of this

content by each teacher. This team teaching approach also enables the staff to enact the 'a third, a third, a third' model in classrooms, whereby one third of the class time is on direct instruction, one third is used for independent learning and practice and one third of time is used for cooperative and collaborative learning. Having multiple teachers in the classroom enables more fluidity in this approach, where a teacher could be supporting students working cooperatively while the other teacher is delivering direct instruction based on the needs of the students. Kate was keen to employ this teaching from day one of her principalship but was also aware of the need to engage the staff in the action research process of what good teaching looks like.

> "I was going to go to teacher teams from day one. I had already decided that. I had to keep each teacher accountable. So we did the team teaching in English and Maths and then the next year we did it in English, Maths and Humanities. It is now in Year 7, Year 8 and Year 9. I am looking at team teaching all the way up. That allows for greater differentiation" (P).

Kate knew that she wanted to ensure quality instruction and worked on this from the first day. Kate provided the ongoing support that her staff needed to develop a curriculum, a pedagogy and is, on an ongoing basis, putting mechanisms in place for staff to reflect on these essential elements of an effective school.

5.9 Principal Leadership Characteristics

The turnaround being experienced at East Meadows College has required Kate to demonstrate particular characteristics recognised by herself, but also observable by her colleagues. These characteristics have been repeatedly identified throughout the interviews and observations as contributors to the principal's influence on the school improvement process taking place at East Meadows College. Kate's ability to communicate with clarity and regularity has ensured the messages she has delivered to staff have been received. These messages were often related to her high expectations and her deep moral purpose to ensure the students were receiving the best education available to them. As a result, Kate faced adversity along the way, whether through difficult conversations with members of the school community, personal challenges or with the bureaucracy involved in running a school. Her commitment was unquestionable and her drive has remained consistent throughout.

Table 5.11: Number of interview comments attributed to themes of Principal characteristics

Theme	P	AP	CL	BM	LC	SCP	LT 1	LT2	LT3	S1	S2	PR	Total
Strong Communicator	14	11	5	11	9	13	11	9	10	10	6	13	122
High Expectations	23	5		7	3		7	8	11	9	2	2	77
Resilient/Strong Leader	30	1		8	10	5	2	6	2	2		4	70
Moral Purpose	32	2		1		4	1	5	4	1	1	3	54
Committed	13	3		5	4	4	4	2	1	3	1	2	42

Table 5.11 lists the themes identified through the interviews with a variety of stakeholders from East Meadows College and the frequency of which these themes were encountered through each of the interview groups.

Each of these themes are discussed in greater detail for the remainder of this section.

5.9.1 Strong Communicator

A clear strength of Kate is her communication style. Her ability to influence, inspire, empathise and demand has been evident throughout her life and she uses this communication style to build relationships that support her success in education. When Kate first arrived at East Meadows, a school with a context similar to the one she experienced as a school student, she quickly communicated to the students her understanding of their situation and encouraged them to continue to aspire to anything they desired;

> "I say to students, "Don't ever say you can't, you can, you just might need to find a different way to get there". I say this because I am being honest with the students. I've told them I didn't do well at school and I didn't maximise my opportunities" (P).

This level of honesty and openness resonates with the students, who understand that Kate is working for them and wants them to do their best;

> "She wants you to do your best and she emphasises that only YOU know your best. She always says, "Don't say you can't, you can, you just have to find another way around it" (S1).

As well as being inspired by Kate, the students see what Kate is doing to involve their parents in their education through different mediums of communication. Kate has introduced a

Learning Management System (LMS) to ensure the levels of communication she prides herself on are reflected across the school;

> "She tries to get parents involved. We use Compass (LMS) so parents can see what tasks are due, school absences etc. She encourages parents to use Compass" (S1).

Kate's relationships with parents is recognised by the students as a great example of her communication style and epitomises the hands on role she plays as principal;

> "She deals with parents personally. She does not get the office staff to deal with it. If there is an issue, like a student's attendance numbers are low, she will call the parents and understand what is happening outside of school hours" (S2).

Kate has demonstrated a strong communication style with staff, students, parents and wider community, to ensure her vision for East Meadows is understood and supported. Her success in articulating her vision is recognised;

> "She has a great vision and she knows where she wants to go. She is able to articulate that" (LT1).

> "She was very good at communicating her vision, getting all the staff rowing in the same way" (LT2).

> "Kate has a vision. She has brought this into the school and the purpose documents to show what the school stands for. She has been able to communicate this to the community well" (PR).

Kate's vision of being the 'College of choice' required her to create an orderly learning environment and change the perception the school had in the community. To achieve this, she communicated her behavioural expectations constantly with the community. Kate wanted all students to feel safe and was relentless in her message;

> "All of our students know who she is and what her expectations are. She is consistent in her message of respect and having high expectations. That consistency helps her achieve what she is aiming for the school" (LT1).

As discussed previously, Kate engaged the community in developing a 'Code of Conduct' and a 'Student Engagement, Wellbeing and Inclusion policy'. Not only was this a guiding document that would ensure the sustainability of these expectations beyond Kate's tenure as principal, but it would also be referred to regularly when addressing the community;

> "We have a College Code of Conduct and we go through with students at the beginning of the year. It is reinforced at assemblies and Home groups. Even in class time. Regularly reminding our students of what the expectations are and the explanation is important – to identify whether the decision is being made because of safety, learning etc and why the consequences are what they are" (LT1).

Such documentation makes the communication with parents much easier and more transparent and Kate knows her role requires her to engage in difficult conversations;

> "Kate does not shy away from dealing with difficult parents. I have seen her in action and she is very supportive of staff. She will make no apologies for having high standards of the students with regard to behaviour and uniform" (LT3).

The introduction of the LMS has ensured that the school proactively communicates with parents, rather than only through school reports or when a student has behaved inappropriately. East Meadows also seeks opportunities to affirm student behaviour and performance by ringing parents at regular opportunities;

> "We have a program in place where our coordinators will ring parents about positives. There is constant engagement with parents" (AP).

As well as communicating directly with the parents, there is a proactive approach to communicating successes more broadly;

> "We acknowledge all of our students at our speech night with all of their achievements throughout the year. It doesn't have to always be about school, it can be outside of school. These are recognised on Compass (LMS), at assemblies and in the newsletter. Sometimes at School Council we will discuss these achievements. There are many forums that we do it in and it is not just based on school achievement" (SCP).

Kate's communication skills enable her to deliver a strong and consistent message, making clear her vision and expectations. Over time, staff moved to making regular contact with parents through many mediums. The introduction of the LMS was a significant support mechanism for staff to reflect the communication standards Kate modelled and expected. This level of communication has been a key area in supporting all aspects of school improvement.

5.9.2 High Expectations

One of the clear changes at East Meadows College during Kate's tenure was the increase in expectations placed on staff and students. The change was recognised by students, particularly those with older siblings who had experienced the leadership of previous principals;

> "My older sister was here during the previous principal. The uniform was not as enforced. Now that Kate is here, the uniform is looking good and the rules are strict but fair" (S1).

Kate recognised that the major challenge that was facing her was the lack of expectation she encountered on her arrival;

> "All of the staff had briefings every morning and would wander off to class late";
>
> "A challenge was getting people into classes, as a lot of kids were not in the class. They were actually out with all the welfare";
>
> "There was no curriculum at all and everybody was just doing what they wanted, so there was no continuity of anything across the whole school" (P2).

The enforcement of uniform expectations is a good example of all expectations made by Kate on the school community; she was relentless in her pursuit of acceptance and alignment across the board. The experience Kate brought to East Meadows enabled her to identify the pathway she needed to take for this school to begin its improvement journey;

> "I was going to enforce the third, third, a third model. I was going to go to teacher teams from day one. I had already decided that. Even if I get some decent teachers, I have got to keep each of them accountable" (P2).

There was opposition to Kate's drive. Staff found the change particularly difficult;

> "The pushback was unbelievable. I ended up with the merit board because they said I was trying to make them work too hard because I was making them write curriculum" (P1).

This level of determination ensured the expectations formed part of a cultural change for the school whereby students and parents began to expect more from their schooling and aspire to greater things beyond school;

> "When I first arrived, there were pockets of students and families that were happy to be mediocre. They didn't necessarily have any aspirations to see what was out

there in the community. They were happy just to get a job or not do very much. Whereas, I think now we have a number of students and families that want what's best for their kids in a really positive way and are happy to work with the school to get them to that point, whether that be university, TAFE or employment" (AP).

Such a change in the school's culture has taken a number of years to attain. Kate has documented and regularly communicated her higher expectations so that they become part of the culture of the school and are not lost beyond her tenure. This disciplined approach to developing higher expectations has meant that the responsibility of upholding these expectations is distributed across the school;

"The difference now is the leadership group sets particular rules and guidelines and everybody follows them. You have to follow them. If you don't do it, there are guidelines now" (BM).

This level of documentation supports all staff to ensure they understand what is expected of them. Whether staff have short term or long term positions with the school, there are structures and processes in place that ensure they understand the expectations;

"The culture of high expectations is apparent, so no-one is getting away with anything. I work with Casual Relief Teachers as Daily Organiser and I take them through our culture of high expectations and this is what we expect from our students with regard to behaviour, respect etc" (LT3).

In a school that was suffering from low expectations, it was essential the principal was clear and firm in developing a new direction with high expectations. Although opposition to this would always be expected, clear and consistent communication of her expectations enabled Kate to attract a guiding coalition of supporters that have led to a new culture of high expectations at East Meadows College.

5.9.3 Resilient/Strong leader

With some personal experiences to harden her, along with many years of experience in schools that had seen marked improvement, it is unsurprising the DET sought Kate when they were looking for a strong leader to turn around a school with declining enrolments. As an Executive Principal, Kate is employed by the DET and not the school council, which can cause difficulty for the principal from the very beginning;

"Kate's work as an executive principal, it was a different appointment than normal. It is a department process, not a community one, which means you come into the

> school without the endorsement of the school. Which can make things difficult. Your license is to do what the department wants you to do, fix the school. Which can sometimes be at odds with what the community wants. Communities get used to things, even if there not the best things to be doing and that is what we found here" (LC).

With the backing of the department, Kate set about a great deal of change to turn around the decline of the school. This level of change was met with a lot of opposition and Kate was forced to withstand a great deal of negativity from the staff and the parents, some more threatening than others;

> "I had parents threatening to kill me, so I had to have emergency management meet me here and take me home because the threats were serious" (P).

> "When Kate first came here, there were a lot of staff that had been here for some time, so change was really hard if you have been here for 30 years, you are used to doing it a certain way. We were basically all used to taking our time. That was a very hard for Kate at the beginning. She wanted to introduce changes but there were some that were just not willing" (BM)

The negativity was not just limited to these groups but was also felt from the students. Their biggest upheaval was around heightened expectations, in particularly the enforcement of wearing the new school uniform;

> "From the students' perspective they did not like the change. Kate was into changing everything when she first arrived. She changed the uniform and changed how everything went. Both my children needed time to work through things being done differently. The kids picked up straight away that she was going to be a lot stricter. They felt she had come in with a big stick and change everything. The kids need boundaries. Especially with the uniform, the kids never seem to care – they would turn up in whatever and no one ever said anything. Now the kids look decent. Kate enforced every child to have an East Meadows school bag" (PR).

Not only did Kate have all the different members of the school community finding it difficult to adapt to her expectations as school leader, she also had to face the Merit Protection Board. The Merit Protection Board is responsible for making available to department employees a process by which grievances can be investigated. In the face of such adversity, Kate demonstrated great resilience and strength as a leader. Much of the change that took place initially needed to be

driven by her without the collaboration that is now more evident in her leadership at East Meadows College;

> "Her leadership style is a little autocratic, "Do as I say or jump off the ship"" (LT2).

> "The impression I get is that Kate rules with an iron fist. It is suggested that the school council rubber stamps anything that Kate wants" (PR).

Kate's bullet-proof exterior was important in the beginning of her tenure to ensure change could happen. However this façade also hid a caring and supportive principal, who understood the importance of relationships;

> "She's tough but she is also soft. She is tough in her decisions but if you have a problem and go to her, she will do anything for you. There is a softness to her. She is tough but if there is something that is not right, or you are upset, she is really good. There is another side to her. She can't show it all the time but when it is needed, it is there" (BM).

> "Outwardly it could look like she rules with an iron fist, but the reality is she offers flexibility and a great deal of support" (LT3).

Kate's strength is undeniable and her ability to manage so much change in such a short amount of time is a credit to her resilience in the face of hard work. This drive has been recognised by her staff as an ingredient to her success and a big part of the improvement in the school;

> "She is definitely a very strong leader. She drives for change and makes us believe it is possible" (LT1).

> "She is strong and unapologetic. She stands her ground" (LT3).

Kate's success in leading in such a way has led to a consensus amongst her leading staff as to the type of leadership that will be required to continue on the school improvement journey;

> "The leadership qualities and characteristics we require to sustain our school improvement will be a clear vision, consistency, well informed decisions and strength in leadership" (LT1).

> "Strong leadership is essential" (LT2).

> "We will require firmness and fairness. We need to be 'thick-skinned', as we do have parents who can be challenging and demanding and so you need to be prepared to challenge parents and students" (LT3).

Kate's strong leadership and resilience are valuable characteristics that have served her well in making difficult decisions, holding firm against opposition from staff, students and parents, as well as maintaining confidence in the direction she is taking the school. Her strength and resilience has now built a level of trust in her community that will support the school improvement journey moving forward.

5.9.4 Moral Purpose

Motivating Kate to work through many of her professional and personal challenges was her strong moral purpose. This was evident many times throughout the interviews with Kate and echoed by many of her leading staff, parent representatives and students. Kate's reason for entering education after completing a science degree was she felt she could make a real difference to the students.

> "I was beginning to get frustrated because I started to think there are people coming out of school that did not have a good attitude that wanted apprenticeships. There were also people who, talking to a lot of people in education, it was almost like it was just a job and there wasn't that passion for it. I started to want to get back into school and start to look at where I could make a difference and I always been a little bit out there in wanting to make a difference" (P).

This desire to make a difference led to some experience in very challenging contexts which helped Kate strengthen her moral purpose as she encountered students with very difficult lives;

> "I went to Western College and that's where I really saw that it doesn't matter what your background, you can do well. There was another teacher, who along with me, got students under the old Common Assessment Task system, to get all A+ in a school where everybody else was failing. That's when I thought don't tell me kids can't get there, they can. I thought you give kids time, no matter what their background, they can achieve" (P).

This realisation, along with further influential leadership experiences, finally led Kate to East Meadows, in an area she knew very well;

> "When the transition numbers from the local primary school were in, and there were only 15 enrolments for the school, I thought I live locally, and I thought about it and questioned why should the kids in this area miss out. I hadn't sent my

children to this school. Most people I knew were not sending their children to this school, so something had to be done" (P).

Her belief that a well rounded education was a necessity to support all students develop employability skills. These skills provided students with choice beyond secondary school, whether the choice was university, industry based education or employment;

> "We have an obligation to the students to their physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. It's about developing the student to do the best that they can and who will also be employable, I am big on employable. You can have all the skills and knowledge in the world but if you don't have the appropriate attitude, it's not worth it. You can take someone with the right attitude and teach them the knowledge and skills" (P).

The focus on employability skills was a shared understanding across the community. The teachers were very much aligned with the vision of providing their students every possibility beyond school;

> "Kate is big on building the individual to contribute to the global community. It is very much about employability skills and what they can take from their schooling education and succeeding in post school life" (LT3).

> "Many of the students may head down a VCAL pathway and not need the content I teach them. I would like the kids to have the same thoughtful approach to any learning. The ability to organise themselves goes beyond the academics but to employability skills and/or skills to be a human or an adult. What is going to make your life easier and to make better choices" (LT2).

The understanding that the school is readying students for life beyond school is shared by the students and parents;

> "I know Kate has been able to make connections with different companies and businesses in the community. That will need to continue and I know Kate will want to do this to ensure the students are "job ready"" (PR).

> "It has allowed us that when we finish Year 12, we have lots of choice; universities, TAFE and many things we can do. It is thanks to Kate. We have people reaching out to us, such as external people" (S1).

Kate's arrival to East Meadows was met with trepidation due to the amount of change she instigated. However, over time, the community came to understand Kate's real motivation was to put the students' first. This realisation was stated very clearly by the school council president;

> "She puts the students first at all times. And they are her number one priority. Everything she does within the school is about the students and what they want and what she can do to make their school experience better. I think she is a great leader, she leads by example" (SCP).

Kate was now seen as a strong asset for a school that now had a lot to believe in.

5.9.5 Committed

Given the amount of change that has taken place at East Meadows over a relatively short period of time, Kate has committed to her role and her vision for the school. This level of commitment did not just appear at the beginning of her tenure, but has been apparent all through her life. This trait was particularly highlighted when she had unsuccessfully sought entry to tertiary studies. Pushing aside her disappointment, Kate took an alternative route;

> "You are going to find it quite bizarre how I got into my course, but all my friends got into courses and I went in with one of my friends, who was doing applied science, and went along every day, and when numbers dropped, they said to me, "You have been coming along, why don't you stay"" (P).

The combination of commitment and, as discussed in the previous section, her strong moral purpose for all students to have access to a good education, meant East Meadows College was blessed with a leader that was going to make a real difference to their school.

School improvement did not come easily. Kate not only had to apply her knowledge of best practice for school improvement but she needed to commit a great deal of personal time. This level of commitment is recognised by those around her;

> "She never stops. I said that to her last week. I just don't know how she keeps going. She works late. She works every single weekend, be it here or at home. I just don't know. I can't answer that. She is continuous in her work. She always trying to make something better or introducing something new. She just doesn't stop. She really wants to make this the school of choice" (BM).

The commitment to change a failing school cannot just come from one person but must include many. Kate's level of commitment has led to many staff demonstrating similar commitment;

> "The other thing the staff are doing and they don't see it as a chore, is to be helping the students at recess, lunch time, after school and via email. They are constantly giving students feedback and if the students want more practice, the teachers will give it to them. Even in the Arts and Technology subjects, making it available to the students. Teachers will even come in on Saturdays because students want to spend more time performing together in their groups" (P).

> "Now Kate and the senior school teachers guide the kids to do the best that they can. They are always helping the kids to work harder and smarter. They have study workshops on how to do things and they have holiday classes especially before exams. They really work hard with the kids to get them prepared" (BM).

Most importantly, the students of East Meadows recognised that Kate was working to make school a better place for them. This understanding was clear in the interviews with the student groups, as they highlighted the changes they have seen in the school during their time, or in comparison to an older sibling. They recognised Kate's level of commitment;

> "At first, Kate can appear intimidating, but once you get to know her better, you know she just wants the best for you and the school. She is looking out for us" (S1).

> "There are days where you will not see her but there are days where you see her all the time. The days she is not here, she will be at the local primary schools, or in her office, or she is connecting to the universities for the betterment of our school. She is either here or doing something for the school elsewhere" (S2).

With recognition of her and her staff's commitment to school improvement, Kate is well on the way to changing the perception people have of East Meadows, a significant factor in the sharp decline in enrolments over the preceding 10 years. Kate was committed to this change;

> "My response to those who asked what length of time was required to make the changes sustainable, was it would take at least seven years to get it to the point where there was community confidence" (P).

Kate also sought the advice of her leadership coach in ways she could employ to enhance the school's reputation. Kate has used this advice to change the school's image;

> "Reputational stuff is always a big challenge but I think she does everything humanly possible to address that broad community view. All of the media methods are used, which I think is really good. There is some terrific initiatives going on in the school which profile the school. You can't just only profile the school to your

> community, you have got to do it to other people even though it may not directly result in enrolments for you but you have to enhance the reputation of the work you are doing in a place" (LC).

A strategic plan, along with the commitment from many staff has made a big difference to the morale of the school community, providing a strong injection of positivity. This desirable culture can lead to changes in student attitudes to learning and improvement, which, in turn, can influence the level of success at school. It is clear East Meadows is heading towards a much improved future thanks to the level of commitment demonstrated by the principal and staff.

5.10 Summary of Principal Characteristics

Kate's commitment to the role of Executive Principal was undeniable, and this coupled with her high expectations and moral purpose ensure East Meadows had the best opportunity to be led on an improvement journey. Kate committed to the long hours and overcoming the level of resistance that would be expected from a community that had created a culture of low expectations and disorder. In the beginning, the resistance was strong and Kate's resilience was tested but she remained true to her moral purpose. As a result, she now has a whole community that truly believes the school's mission is to empower every child to enjoy life beyond school, whether that be employment, university or further vocational education.

5.11 Contribution of Others to Leadership and Success

Kate's transformation of East Meadows from a school of declining enrolments and low levels of success to a school embarking on an improvement journey, with increased enrolments and excellent growth in academic success, can be attributed to more than just Kate's leadership. From the very beginning, Kate knew what she needed to do to turn around East Meadows. However she was also very aware she needed a guiding coalition to achieve it.

In developing the new vision and values, along with the logo and motto for the school, Kate was adamant she needed to involve others in this process to ensure there was engagement and ownership. Kate called upon the students to identify the values important to them. The acronym formed by the values identified by the students became central to the motto used with the new logo. The students connected strongly to this and embraced the new uniform, resulting in an easier transition to a key element of the high expectations placed on the students, that being the strict enforcement of wearing the school uniform.

The students were also engaged with to develop school policies and were a voice on the School Council, even before this became a mandatory requirement for government schools. The engagement of students in this way demonstrated Kate's moral purpose of keeping the student at the centre of all decision making;

> "It was always about the children. It was never about salary, it was always about the students. I probably didn't have the background with all of the sport and yet I was still able to achieve. I think there's a lot of children in the world who are absolutely brilliant that don't get that chance" (P).

Creating an orderly environment was an early goal set by Kate, along with developing the teaching and learning. Kate arrived at East Meadows with no staff member in a teaching and learning leadership position. As such, Kate needed to restructure, her staff, which included making staff redundant and moving others out of roles they were having no impact in. This enabled Kate to bring in curriculum leadership and a more effective Assistant Principal. Due to budget restraints, this took a couple of years. Until these roles were filled, Kate was in charge of the teaching and learning, as well as all other responsibilities as principal. Once Kate employed her teaching and learning leader, as well as a new Assistant Principal and Heads of Junior and Senior schools, these staff, along with the Data, Maths and Numeracy leader and Business manager became central members of the Strategic Leadership team. This team were the key drivers of change at East Meadows.

As well as influencing staff and students within East Meadows to be contributors to the school improvement, staff from East Meadows saw the contributions local primary schools could make to the development of their students prior to their transition to the school. Staff at East Meadows, particularly the Assistant Principal and the English and Mathematics teachers, worked closely with staff from local primary schools to develop a shared understanding of what skills, knowledge and understandings Year 6 students should have at the end of primary school that will lead to greater success for them on entry to secondary education. This proactive approach to improve academic standards of East Meadows students meant that the contributors to the success of East Meadows was distributed right across the local community.

5.12 Chapter Summary

The case study of East Meadows College demonstrates what is possible when a visionary leader enters a school in decline and commits to the unrelenting task of turning it around. Kate's understanding of the school context, as well as personal characteristics of being strong and

resilient with high expectations and a strong moral purpose, were all essential in pushing forward a vision of hope and possibility as the community at East Meadows College sought to understand what her mantra of "College of choice" really meant. Initially, this required a strong stance on expectations and raising these to reflect a school that took pride in itself and what it wanted to achieve. Improving the environment, developing stricter behavioural expectations, as well as engaging with students about what they wanted school to be, all provided a more orderly environment for all community members to enjoy. Kate sought support from the Department of Education and Training and the parents to ensure the changes were accepted by the community and that they realised the changes being implemented were not going to be fleeting. Expectations placed on students in regard to attendance and the wearing of the school uniform, drew attention to the changes happening at East Meadows.

Whilst developing an orderly environment, Kate drew on the staff's expertise to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Her first step in this process was ensuring East Meadows had the documentation in place to support her longer term goal of leading a high performing school. The curriculum, along with a consistent pedagogical approach, the implementation of peer observations and a model whereby the teachers received feedback on their teaching from students, was setting East Meadows as a model school of contemporary practice.

To achieve all of this, Kate restructured her staff and recruited strategically to fulfil the needs of her school and ensure it had the necessary capacity to improve. Kate brought in staff she knew she could rely on and she put structures in place to ensure her current staff, particularly her leadership group, were developed to meet the demands and expectations of their positions. This included regular meetings, professional development, as well as opportunities to attend external conferences and use a leadership coach. All of these support mechanisms developed a strong team that were creating a commendable school improvement journey.

During Kate's tenure she has constantly needed to look inward to improve the mechanisms of the school; however, her real strength has been from her outward looking approach to education. She strongly believes that schools cannot be "silos" and along with her industry experience, she seeks to enrich her school and students' experience with connections to the world around them. These connections seek to develop students that are ready to fulfil their potential on leaving high school. Kate's strong moral purpose prioritised students' employability skills and/or readiness for tertiary education.

What was consistent throughout every change initiative was Kate's mantra of, "Don't ever say you can't, you can, you just might need to find a different way to get there". This relentless

approach to achieve a positive outcome has served Kate well throughout her career and life. Her staff are carried by this attitude and have become invested in what is possible at East Meadows because of Kate's commitment to distributing responsibility to staff as their capacity grows.

The recent growth in NAPLAN and VCE median study scores highlight the effort being made by Kate and her staff. This is the end result of much toil in changing the culture, attitude and expectations of the school community. Kate's work is not over yet as the gains now being made need to be embedded and sustained.

CHAPTER 6: CROSS CASE COMPARISONS

6.1 Introduction

A comparison of the two case studies discussed in this thesis will provide further insights into practices and characteristics of principals that are successful in leading and improving low educational advantage schools. Whilst this chapter will focus on comparing and contrasting those practices and characteristics, there will be references made to the influence of the context; which will also be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

This chapter will be framed with the same overview as can be found in the case studies for each school;

- Overview of the principal's history as an educator
- School Profile including;
    - School environment
    - Enrolments
    - Attendance
    - Governance
- School Context including;
    - Community demographic
    - Staff retention and recruitment
    - School vision
    - School Performance
    - Structure of leadership
- Principal Study of Practices and Characteristics
- Contribution of others in the success of the school
- Summary of cross case comparisons

6.2 Principal's History

Peter and Kate had both grown up in areas similar to the school's they led. Whilst they knew the challenges their students faced at a school with a low educational advantage, they were also intimately aware of the home life many students would experience. These experiences helped to develop an early, strong sense of moral purpose and social justice which would influence their decision making throughout their careers.

Whilst Peter's journey through the education profession has been quite conventional, the same could not be said for Kate. Peter progressed through Teacher's College and was immediately employed in a country school before moving into low educational advantage schools in the city. Kate entered a science course unconventionally, only being allowed a place because she had attended lectures voluntarily with friends, and dropouts from the course opened a space for her. Kate had previous experience in the hospitality industry and it would be through combining her passion for hospitality and education that she would be led to work in low educational advantage schools seeking to make a difference to the lives of her students. Kate's determination and drive would see her re-imagining how vocational education could be delivered in secondary schools by taking a position with the DET. Her connections with teachers and schools over this time made it apparent that the best chance at changing a broken system was to work in it.

Peter and Kate's career crossed paths at one school in the eastern suburbs. Peter was the principal at this school and led it to be one of the top performing state schools in Victoria. Kate, who was an assistant principal at the time, described the people she worked with as, "the highest performing team around". This shared experience of work in a high performing team at a successful school proved a great training ground for both Kate and Peter as they moved on to their greatest challenges, executive principals of East Meadows College and Northern College respectively. Peter's grounding, experience and success in working in low advantage settings made him an obvious choice to be the first executive principal in the state of Victoria, charged with turning around the performance of three previously separated failing schools in a low socio-economic area of Melbourne to become a destination multi-campus school. Kate's determination, experience and knowledge would serve her well as she faced the challenge of turning around a school in decline.

6.3 School Profile

6.3.1 School Environment

East Meadows and Northern College are both government funded secondary schools in the state of Victoria. The schools serve students from Year 7 to Year 12. Northern College is a multi-campus college, situated on three separate sites. Two of these sites serve Year 7 to Year 9 students and one Year 10 to Year 12 students. Each of the Year 7 to Year 9 sites share their site with a local primary school. East Meadows has all Year 7 to Year 12 students on one site. The school is divided into a Junior School (Year 7 to Year 9) and Senior School (Year 10 to Year 12).

There are no visible boundaries that separate the two sub-schools but senior school students have access to an inside common area.

As part of Northern College's transformation from three separate schools into one college, the sites experienced a $32 million upgrade to its facilities. This included refurbishing some aspects of the school and new buildings. East Meadows College was a traditional courtyard school separated into two distinct quadrangles that are serviced by a communal courtyard in the centre. There was much evidence of run-down facilities. The need for new facilities was highlighted by the local member of parliament pledging five million dollars in the lead up to the next state election.

6.3.2 Staff Numbers

Northern College and East Meadows College both experienced turmoil at the beginning of each principal's tenure. Northern College experienced a large turnover of staff. This was highlighted by the fact that only 78 per cent of staff were retained between 2008 and 2009 in comparison to the state average of 87 per cent. There were over 100 staff at Northern College, so this percentage represented a significant number of staff. One could assume many reasons for this, but Peter's direct style of leading and high expectations would have influenced some staff to move on.

At East Meadows, staffing went from 44 in 2013 to 33 in 2015. This drop was in line with enrolments, which had also declined by approximately 100 students during this time, but it caused great anxiety for the community as a number of staff were classified as in excess and were required to find employment elsewhere. At both schools, the principals placed staff in excess requiring many difficult conversations to be undertaken. Staffing at both schools was a significant challenge especially with regard to attracting high quality staff to low performing schools. Peter relentlessly recruited staff by approaching those he felt would add value to his team. Kate and Peter restructured their leadership team to reflect the needs of the school. Peter was able to add positions to his school leadership team; whereas Kate had to reduce the number of leaders due to her budget.

6.3.3 Enrolments

Enrolments at Northern College remained steady over Peter's tenure, most notably spiking after two years before plateauing for the remainder of his time as principal. On average, during Peter's principalship, there were approximately 1,100 students across the College.

The driving reason the government had employed Kate as an executive principal at East Meadows was the sharp decline in enrolments the school had experienced in the years leading up to her appointment. Between 2008 and 2014 (Kate was appointed in October, 2014), the school's enrolment had decreased from 721 to 398 students. It continued to decline over the next few years. In fact it was not until 2018 that the school saw its first increase in overall enrolment in a decade.

6.3.4 Attendance

Attendance at Northern College was a major concern and priority for Peter on his arrival. It led to a couple of significant decisions by Peter. In consultation with the DET, the school sought permission and support to fail students if they did not reach a pre-determined level of attendance (90 per cent), thereby forcing them to repeat a year of school. This was a short-term measure to address a crisis. Peter also engaged staff to create a 'Satisfactory Completion Policy' for all community members to document the expectations of students and staff with regard to attendance and assessment.

There was not the same focus on attendance at East Meadows College. However Kate had stipulated that a small number of students were having a significant impact on the overall attendance and this was also stated in the school's annual report. Kate believed attendance was not a widespread issue and therefore was not high on the school's priority to drive its improvement journey. The attendance data supported the decline in unapproved absences, which suggested Kate's communication about the Attendance Policy was beginning to make a difference. Any concern about attendance had not led to explicit actions being taken by the school beyond communicating the policy.

6.3.5 Governance

Both schools sit under the direction and guidance of the DET. As such, they are accountable for all expectations placed on them from the government and receive funding to support the education of their students. Peter actively sought further funding from private organisations to boost the opportunities for his students and staff. Although Kate did not share any insight of additional financial support, she actively sought connections to local businesses and organisations that aimed to enhance the experience for students and staff.

Both Kate and Peter acknowledged the support of the DET when required and both seemed well connected to the DET. They both gave examples of when support from the DET was required. Peter sought support when looking to fail students when attendance was not

satisfactory. Kate introduced Saturday detentions following the introduction of their new uniform for those wearing it incorrectly.

The governance of each of these schools includes a school council. In the case of Northern College, one of the principal's earliest changes was to merge three separate school councils into one.

Following this initial challenge, Peter went on to build a strong working relationship with the school council, remaining transparent and enjoying flexibility and retaining relative autonomy in leading the school. Kate appeared to have a very similar experience with East Meadows' school council with regard to decision making. The council showed great faith in the direction Kate was leading the school.

6.4 School Context

Kate and Peter found themselves in similar, but also quite different situations at the beginning of their principalship at East Meadows and Northern College. Both schools lacked vision and direction and needed a strong experienced principal to guide them through their next phase, focusing on improvement.

For Northern College, the amalgamation of three failing schools and re-opening as one multi-campus College provided the community with a symbolic sense of hope that things would be different. East Meadows College's enrolments were in sharp decline and it was facing imminent closure if nothing changed. The school was rundown and required a lot of money to upgrade the facilities. At the time of writing this thesis, the possibility for maintenance funding to upgrade was not forthcoming.

As measured by the ICSEA rating, both schools' level of educational advantage is less than the average of schools across Australia. This educational advantage rating suggests that students have additional challenges to overcome, in order to experience success at school, which appears to be relevant to family income and lack of resources in their local area.

6.5 School Vision

Each school's vision was shaped to reflect that of the strong moral purpose of their principal. They both recognised their responsibility in creating a stepping stone in the life of each student and also as an opportunity to build skills for the future. Northern College's vision statement is explicit in its purpose of preparing students for life beyond secondary school. East Meadows vision statement recognises their aim to be the number one school in the area and to provide

a supportive avenue for students. Although East Meadows' vision is not as explicit as Northern College's in its aim to develop students for life beyond school, many participants during the interview process spoke of developing students' "employability skills and developing the individual to contribute to the global community in order to succeed in post school life". It was clear this vision was about preparing their students for life, not just to achieve a score at the end of Year 12.

What was apparent at both schools was a secondary mantra that was motivated by the moral purpose of each principal. Students and staff at East Meadows referred to Kate's catch cry of, "Don't ever say you can't, you can, you just might need to find a different way to get there". Born from her own experiences, this catch cry resonated with students and recognised that their educational journey may not be as straightforward as others. Two, mantras were often referred to throughout the interview process at Northern College. "Two years of learning in one, for all", was the aim the school had to counteract the deficit of learning with which students entered Northern College, as measured by NAPLAN testing. The other, "low socioeconomic status does not mean low achievement", championed from professional reading Peter had issued his leadership team, to convince them of what was possible for students from schools with a similar profile to that of Northern College.

Each school used their vision and accompanying catch cry to motivate staff to connect to their own moral purpose. Each vision placed the success of the school and ultimately the student at the centre of all, thus enabling all decision making to be driven by these statements to lead to an enhancement in the student learning experience.

6.6 School Performance

6.6.1 NAPLAN

When analysing the NAPLAN data for both schools, the schools both tended to perform similarly to schools with like students in terms of the level of educational advantage. Over a seven year period, with four of them under Kate's principalship, East Meadows has always performed "close to" or "above" their like schools, whereas, over Peter's seven year principalship, Northern College occasionally performed below those of their like schools.

Both schools demonstrated spikes of success. At East Meadows, Kate noted a focus on reading came at the expense of other subjects early in her tenure and she redirected a more balanced approach to supporting the students. Late in Peter's tenure, Northern College experienced three consecutive years where the students performed "above" students from like schools in

the writing test. This could be attributed to the ongoing commitment the school had given to literacy coaches.

When looking at the data more carefully and taking into consideration the growth in students achievement from Year 7 to Year 9, both schools have shown they added value to their students. For Northern College students it was in the area of Reading that students gained more than the average growth of students from similar schools. In the most recent growth chart from 2016 to 2018, students from East Meadows were beginning to show gains greater than students from like schools in each of the areas of reading, writing and numeracy. This could be attributed to the fact that Kate's interventions with a guaranteed and viable curriculum and a common pedagogy, were beginning to take effect, improving the school's performance and enhancing the students experience.

6.6.2 VCE

Both schools have consistently achieved significantly lower than the state average study score of 30 for their Year 12 results.

During Peter's principalship, Northern College achieved an average study score of 24, with a low of 22 and a high of 25. The highest score of 25 was achieved by the cohort that attended the school for the full tenure of Peter's principalship. Over this time, Peter had demanded high expectations from everyone in the community and pushed hard to get them. A guaranteed and viable curriculum was the foundation on which a common pedagogy was built. With the support of strong leadership and curriculum coaching, the school was focusing all of its efforts in achieving the best for its students.

East Meadows College has achieved an average study score of 24.5 under Kate's principalship; the highest study score was 28 in 2018. This performance, along with the gains across the board in NAPLAN, suggest East Meadows is on an improvement trajectory.

6.7 Structure of Leadership

The principals at both Northern College and East Meadows placed great value on their leadership team, creating a leadership structure to support their contexts. Northern College, as a large, multi-campus school had a complex structure that consisted of a principal and assistant principal on each campus. This was in addition to Peter as College Principal. These members of staff made up the school leadership team, which was identified as the Principal Class. Peter invested heavily in building the leadership capacity of this team. First and foremost, he insisted on coaching professional development, but Peter also valued the influence research should

have on decision making. As such, the Principal Class team engaged in literature that was aimed to support the school's stage of improvement or enhance their understanding of leadership. Peter believed that research-based decision making provided confidence for all community members in the vision and direction of the school.

The leadership at East Meadows was less distributed than Northern College due to the size of the school and limited budget. Kate had less flexibility in building a leadership team around her. On arrival, there was no staff member responsible for a teaching and learning leadership position. It took her two years to employ someone to lead the teaching and learning across the school. Prior to the appointment of a teaching and learning leader, Kate drove any curriculum changes she was seeking. Kate also moved from employing two assistant principals to one. This decision reflected the decline in student enrolments and again, it took her some time to make the single appointment that she felt would serve the school best. As a result of the limited leadership, many more daily organisation and student wellbeing decisions were managed by Kate. Observations of Kate noted the continuous traffic of staff seeking her time at East Meadows. In contrast, commentary made about Peter focused heavily on the ongoing professional development of individual leaders and the strategic direction of the school.

6.8 Leadership Themes

The principal practices and characteristics were identified and presented in each case study. For the benefit of this cross-case comparison, meta-themes will be established that look at the practices and characteristics that were evident across both schools and could be viewed as attributes of successful leadership in the context of low educational advantage schools on an improvement journey. The themes identified in Table 6.1 will be discussed in greater detail for the remainder of this chapter.

The opportunity to look at both case studies through the lens of each of these meta-themes provided an insight into the key differences and similarities of the practices and characteristics of the principals. The numerous comparisons within Table 6.1 lead to the consideration of what influence, if any, has the context had on the presentation of practices and characteristics of each principal.

Table 6.1: Meta-themes of characteristics and practices from the case studies

	Peter - Northern College		Kate - East Meadows College	
Leadership meta-themes	Characteristics	Practices	Characteristics	Practices
Collaboration	Built trust with community.	● Engagement with external support. ● Set up curriculum teams. ● Developed leadership team. ● Peer Coaching.	Strong moral purpose.	● Engagement with local community/business. ● Set up curriculum teams. ● Team teaching.
Accountability to focus on core elements of practice	High expectations.	● Assigning a coach to every staff member. ● Curriculum documentation. ● Professional Development. ● Allocated meetings ● Evidence informed decision making. ● Sought funding to support development	High expectations.	● Centralised curriculum documentation. ● Team teaching. ● Teach the teacher feedback. Triads for observations. ● Creative solutions to support development of curriculum.
Setting Directions with high expectations and hope	Strong and relentless. Communication skills. Positive Mindset.	● Two years of learning in one mantra. ● Focus on Attendance. ● Governance support. ● Modelled behaviours.	Positive Mindset. Student first decision making. Resilient.	● Rebranded the school. ● Modelled the school as the College of choice. ● Connected school with local businesses
Change Leadership and Management	Relentless	● Evidence based decision making. ● Used Data to inform - attendance, NAPLAN.	Committed Resilient	● Action research teams formed ● Forming of partnerships with local primary schools
Contextually Aware	Strong moral purpose. Directive to distributive leadership. Built trust with community.	● Sought funding for programs.	Strong moral purpose. Directive leadership.	● Created a sense of urgency early ● Connected to community for opportunities

6.8.1 Collaboration

The evidence of collaboration was strong across both school sites, albeit executed differently and targeted to meet different needs. Peter made it very clear throughout his interviews that collaboration was key to the success of change that was required at Northern College. He modelled the value of collaboration to his school leadership team (Principal Class) from the very beginning as he engaged with external bodies to build capacity in his leadership team and drive improvement through the school. By implementing the Coaching for Success program and utilising the skill and expertise of local university professors, Peter was instilling a strong foundation for his leadership team to lead substantial change moving forward. Given the size

and structure of his multi campus school, collaboration with the Principal Class team was going to be the key to the school's success as he relied on each of the members of this team to disseminate information and implement actions that were discussed. This level of collaboration was also evident in the classrooms and offices of Northern College

Peter implemented Curriculum Design Teams (CDT) to ensure staff were working in their subject areas to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum, along with common assessment tasks and

moderation. These changes were significant for staff and were aimed at raising their teaching and learning expectations. Later in his tenure, Peter introduced peer coaching in these CDT as a way of teachers collaborating with one another to improve their teaching practice.

Whilst Kate also set up CDT to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum, her greatest attention to collaboration took place external to the school where her focus was on building partnerships with local businesses and organisations. Aligning with her strong moral purpose, her vision of becoming the College of choice and seeking industry-based experiences for her students, Kate utilised one of her strongest assets, her ability to network, to make connections in the local community. Kate has had great success in developing these partnerships for her students, staff and for the betterment of the school's image. These collaborations have enhanced the reputation of the school and, although not measurable, have created a better perception of East Meadows through the eyes of the local community. This was particularly important given the dire situation in which the school found itself with declining enrolments.

In both cases, the leaders utilised the theme of collaboration to enhance the school's process, structures and opportunities. For Kate and Peter, collaboration supported the learning opportunities for the students whether it was indirectly through the capacity building of staff

or directly through experiences with businesses and/or organisations. Kate used collaboration in this way to also enhance the school's image in its community

6.8.2 Accountability to focus on core elements of practice

On arrival at their respective schools, Kate and Peter were surprised to find there was very little curriculum documentation and no common pedagogy. The priority of both principals was to develop a guaranteed and viable curriculum and implement a common pedagogical approach. Kate and Peter were strategic in finding time for the teachers to create these essential core elements of schooling and achieved this using two different approaches.

Peter knew there were organisations from whom he could seek support for funding and he prioritised time to find these and apply for them. On receiving funding, Peter used this to provide time within a teacher's load to developing their subject's curriculum. Peter continued to seek funding throughout his tenure to provide opportunities for his staff that would otherwise be unattainable because of cost. After the curriculum had been developed, the funding continued to be used for initiatives such as peer coaching and implementing the School Wide Positive Behaviour Support program, which is the school's behaviour management framework.

When identifying the pedagogical approach that would be best suited to Northern College's context, Peter went through a familiar process with his team. He referred to evidence-based research, distributing this to his school leaders before they peer coached each other in their chosen pedagogy. The leadership team was then empowered to deliver the common message with confidence to their campus teams. The school has documented this pedagogical approach in a handbook titled, 'Northern College: Explicit Instructional Model For Leaders' to ensure its sustainability. Moving forward from its implementation, each staff member was assigned a coach with whom they would set goals pertaining to their teaching and then from whom would receive regular feedback. This model enabled staff not only to develop their practice but also ensure there was a level of accountability to maintain the expected pedagogy.

At East Meadows, Kate orchestrated a way to provide her staff considerable time during the last two weeks of her first term in the principal position. This allowed her staff to scope the skills and vocabulary the students needed to learn from Year 7 to Year 12. Once staff had this basic framework, Kate then invited a curriculum expert in to work with the staff in developing a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Kate wanted the curriculum consistent and centralised. Over the course of six months, staff were supported in moving towards this model.

When employing a common pedagogical approach, Kate already had a clear view on what she believed would work. However, she knew it was important for staff to invest time and research into what pedagogy would be most appropriate for their context. The staff undertook an action research paper to identify an agreed set of strategies to form an instructional model that could be used to improve student outcomes. The school now has an instructional model that has been collaboratively developed and refined and is published in an instructional handbook that is shared with all teachers and support staff. An aspect of this instructional model was for teachers to team teach. This approach enhanced the opportunities for differentiation for the students but also made sure the teachers maintained the pedagogical approach to which the school had committed. Moving forward from its implementation, staff now receive two forms of feedback to seek improvement in their practice. Colleagues form small teams and observe each other's practice and students provide feedback as part of a process to enhance student voice in the learning process.

Kate and Peter identified the same core needs for their schools and implemented new processes and structures quickly. Whilst the implementation process was handled quite differently, they both sought ways to ensure staff were accountable for their implementation and that these changes were sustainable long into the future. The use of peer coaching, ongoing feedback and the formal documentation of processes and structures were common in this practice.

6.8.3 Setting directions with high expectations and hope

When developing the vision for their schools, Kate and Peter needed to carefully consider the context and the school's history to ensure their vision was both aspirational and achievable.

A benefit for both schools was that Peter and Kate knew the challenges their respective communities faced intimately, having attended their own secondary schools in similar contexts. With this understanding, they were both adamant the community deserved better and that this could be achieved. Committed to high expectations and a sense of hope, both principals went about developing a vision for their school.

Peter referred to evidence-based research and shared this with his leadership team to move forward. Referring to schools with similar backgrounds, not only did the literature provide stimulus for his team to create a shared vision for the school, but it provided a sense of hope for the leadership team knowing that others had achieved their aspiration; turning a low performing school into a higher achieving one. Peter also embraced a change management approach to most things. He developed a mantra of, "Two years of learning in one for all" to

create a sense of urgency to turn around the achievement of its students if they were to have any chance in life beyond secondary school.

Peter used the governance of the school to seek DET and School Council support. This engagement with his network and those he was accountable to, was essential in ensuring the whole school community was on board with the change.

Likewise, at East Meadows, Kate arrived at a school with a history of low achievement, with no direction to turn this around. To ensure her vision was targeted and attainable, Kate sought support from the DET and requested a priority review. Such a review is called for when there is "evidence of significant risk to students' achievement, wellbeing or engagement" (DEECD, 2014, p.9). This review provided Kate with the "evidence" she needed to highlight to her leadership team the significance and urgency of the change ahead. The vision the leadership team created together was aimed at enhancing the school's reputation in the community and was accompanied with a new logo that represented the unlimited potential of every student. Kate felt it was essential to rebrand the school so the local community would take notice of and embrace the change.

Beyond creating their school's vision, Kate and Peter worked tirelessly to communicate it with their community. Kate instilled a sense of hope with the students at East Meadows by sharing her mantra with them at every opportunity. Her statement, "Don't ever say you can't, you can, you just might need to find a different way to get there" was recalled by the student participants during the interviews. This mindset, along with the school's focus on developing students' employability skills and Kate's strong moral purpose, enabled her to make strong connections with local businesses and organisations. Kate was committed to ensuring students had the opportunities that would inspire and encourage them to attend school and to seek further education or employment beyond secondary school.

Peter used a mantra, "low socioeconomic does not mean low achievement", to provide a sense of hope and direction. He directed this more to his leadership team and teaching staff to influence their expectations and interactions with the students. Peter particularly targeted the way teachers addressed student discipline, often modelling to staff how this could be done. Over time, staff understood more could be expected of their students and a culture of high expectations was realised.

Peter and Kate knew their community needed hope to see a brighter future and this was communicated strongly and regularly with all members of the community. In time, the

communities began to believe that greater things were possible with heightened expectations and enhanced opportunities that reflected the needs of the students at the school.

6.8.4 Change Leadership and Management

Northern College and East Meadows undertook significant change when Kate and Peter arrived. Following a merge of three failing schools, Northern College was looking for a new beginning but required a leader that would have the capacity to drive change across a multi campus school, which fundamentally had the same students and staff that were previously employed.

The decline in East Meadows enrolment was the culmination of a reputation in tatters, teachers lacking direction and leadership and students with little expectation placed on them. They needed a strong, visionary leader that would make an impression quickly.

Both leaders led significant change quickly and, either explicitly and/or subtly, engaged in a change management process on many levels. Peter was very explicit in the way he enacted change. He was heavily influenced by John Kotter's change management framework and would often refer to the stages when describing the process he enlisted with his school. At the beginning of his tenure, he created a sense of urgency around the level of achievement and expectation. He would refer to evidence-based research or data, such as NAPLAN and attendance, to highlight the significance of the issue. This would be the catalyst for change. Peter was very convincing, and his Principal Class team quickly became a guiding coalition collaborating with him on strategies to improve the situation he encountered. The key to the level of change that took place at Northern College was Peter's commitment to coaching training. This training formed the foundation on which all change took place. He relied heavily on his Principal Class team to distribute the vision and direct each campus, ensuring that crucial change would be embraced and enabled. Over time, the investment Peter made in his Principal Class team ensured all change initiatives were collaborated on, uniting this group and then enabling the process to then be distributed further to the campus leadership groups. The benefit of implementing change across a larger school was that by the time a change initiative was broadly shared with the college and campus leadership groups, up to one third of all staff had already been exposed to it and, in most instances, would be supportive of it. Therefore, the level of acceptance meant that resistance to change was minimised.

The change Kate undertook was no less significant but on a smaller scale at East Meadows. A much smaller school with fewer members of the leadership team meant Kate was the driver and face of the change that took place across the school. Kate thought carefully about who she would engage in the processes of this change. When rebranding the school and issuing a new

uniform, Kate knew it was imperative to engage and collaborate with the students and parents in the change so that there was a significant "buy in" before the new uniform was released. Despite having a predetermined idea of what instructional model would work best in the East Meadows' context, Kate knew it was imperative to engage the teaching staff early in the process, so they too felt ownership of the significant change affecting their school. She utilised her network in the Department of Education to involve her staff in the teaching practices she envisioned for East Meadows and slowly created a guiding coalition of staff, committed to her approach and the benefits it would bring.

Although Kate and Peter were very collaborative in managing change, they both also made decisions independently when it involved non-negotiable aspects such as curriculum and professional development. Kate made it clear to staff her expectations of how curriculum should be documented, which caused great distress for some staff and due to the leadership structure at East Meadows the staff challenged her directly. Peter enforced the CDT and raised the expectations of staff to attend more meetings that were focused on school and teacher improvement. He enlisted their strength in communicating the new process and encouraged great resilience to stand by the decisions which had been made.

Change management was necessary at both schools for improvement to happen. The size of the school and the structure of the leadership team influenced how change was managed and the amount of change that took place at any one time. Kate and Peter engaged their community with a catch cry beyond the official school vision that enabled a clear message of hope and aspiration. This level of communication, along with their resilience were key characteristics in successful change management at their schools.

6.8.5 Contextually Aware

Kate and Peter were both employed as Executive Principals by the DET. As such, the School Council, which is the usual body that would make principal appointments in Victorian department schools, had no influence on this decision. By taking this approach, the department recognised that these schools faced extraordinary challenges and identified Kate and Peter as suitable candidates for these appointments. The DET provided insight for Peter and Kate about the current challenges at each school and what resourcing and support would be available to them. DET appreciated that it would take a great deal of commitment to be successful. This endorsement of their leadership capability gave both Peter and Kate confidence to embrace the demands of their roles and with their prior knowledge and backgrounds they both had great awareness of the context of these appointments. As mentioned previously, Kate and Peter

attended high school in similar contexts to East Meadows and Northern College respectively. They also had experience teaching in low educational advantage schools and were members of the same leadership team that previously turned around a low performing school into one of the highest performing state secondary schools in the state. These professional experiences, along with a personal understanding of the student experience only confirmed their desire to make a difference. What was evident in both principals was the strength of their moral purpose and their understanding of the change that needed to happen.

Peter used his story to connect to the staff and the direction the school was taking. He wanted the staff to understand that he had experienced his own challenges growing up and was aware of the context and the families they were working with. This built trust with his community, which could be leveraged by Peter to introduce the magnitude of change the school required to turn around the history of failure of the previous schools. Peter never stopped reminding his staff about the difference they could make to their students' lives by maintaining their focus on what matters most, "catching them (students) up".

Peter was relentless in pursuing what was best for his students. He would often refer to what the school was doing to "even up" the experience for their students, i.e. enhancing their school experience and making it fairer given the students have so many challenges beyond the classroom. Peter highlighted the importance of teacher recruitment and the difference a high-quality teacher made to the life of a student. Peter invested heavily in recruiting the best staff for his school and would often target people and communicate with them directly to encourage their application.

Peter also knew that the financial capital required to turn the school around was not available to him, so he was relentless in seeking funding beyond the DET. Such initiatives were received well by staff who knew if they wanted to innovate with a new program or experience and complemented this with a strong proposal, they would most likely be supported by their principal.

Kate, too, demonstrated a strong moral purpose and stepped into the role because she did not understand why the students at East Meadows did not have access to a good education. She had overcome her own challenges in life and knew what was required for East Meadows to be successful. She used her own experiences to empower her students to build resilience and look for alternative paths if they at first did not succeed. Her approach was to make a high impact early so that the community knew things were going to be different. This included rebranding the school, which, as discussed earlier, Kate included community at many different levels.

Kate utilised her industry experience to seek strong connections and involvement with local businesses and organisations, knowing that they could help engage those students who were not academically focused on traditional core subjects. Their support with vocational experiences aligned with Kate's personal philosophy of a good education and addressed the vision of the school to become the college of choice for the community and employers, as well as develop students' employability skills. Kate was aware that not all students in her school were going to attend university. She was committed to providing these students with the skills to enable them to succeed along whatever pathway they chose.

Kate and Peter both demonstrated a change in leadership style over the course of their tenure. Initially, the enormity of the task and the amount of change required, resulted in Kate and Peter demonstrating autocratic leadership. This style of leadership has been recognised as an effective approach when turning around an underperforming school. The evidence of this style was much stronger when analysing the interviews from Northern College. Peter declared he needed to be quite direct at the beginning of his tenure because there was a lack of leadership experience and role clarity and therefore, he needed to be explicit. Whereas, at East Meadows, although there were a number of references to Kate's autocratic approach, whereby she pushed for things to happen quicker or she demanded a great deal of staff, this was less evident. In her fourth year of principal, there was evidence of Kate releasing the responsibility of leadership more to others. She had made appointments that freed her from the day to day teaching and learning leadership and also included the employment of a data analyst as part of the school leadership team to support decision making going forward. At the end of Peter's tenure, he felt he had empowered the leadership team to the point they could manage themselves. He noted that the campus leaders no longer needed to come to him for every decision they made.

Kate and Peter were both very aware of the challenges that faced them in their schools but using their knowledge of the context these schools are founded, they made an immediate impact. The changes they undertook early and the way they went about them, enabled the community to understand their vision and support the school's improvement journey. Their styles of leadership were similar; however, the different school structures meant that the actions from the decisions made were implemented differently.

6.9 Contribution of others in the success of the school

As discussed in the previous section, the pressure and urgency for Kate and Peter to change existing practices were clear and resulted in an autocratic leadership style being demonstrated

at first. Whilst their leadership was autocratic, Peter and Kate demonstrated post-heroic leadership by also engaging groups to generate some momentum.

At East Meadows, Kate engaged parents and students to rebrand the school, and sought teacher input into developing a common pedagogy. As the staff and students moved closer towards the practices expected of an improving school, Kate released more and more responsibility. Student feedback and input was sought to help drive pedagogical change, develop policies and drive initiatives at School Council. Along with strong student input, Kate worked towards a more capable leadership team that included a teaching and learning leader and an assistant principal she could trust. These leaders, along with the other members of the Strategic Leadership Team were called upon to support the change at East Meadows. Part of the leadership teams' contribution to the improvement included engaging the local primary schools in understanding their role in preparing students for secondary school through moderation and sharing of curriculum expectations.

At Northern College, Peter identified the need for rigorous coaching training for leadership staff. Through professional development and ongoing meetings that invested in building the Principal Class leaders as agents of change, the campus principals and their assistant principals were able to significantly influence the teachers at each of their respective campus'. This was the only way Peter would be able to achieve change and improvement in a multi campus school. The Principal Class leaders' contribution to the ongoing leadership of the College was essential. Their leadership empowered the other leaders working on each campus and driving change within the CDT. This model had proven successful by way of managing the change process from the school principal to the classroom.

Whilst Peter focused heavily on developing his school leadership team to have the capacity to contribute to the success of the school, Kate utilised all members of the community on a 'needs basis', providing them the opportunity to "buy in" to the success of the school improvement process.

6.10 Summary of cross case comparisons

There were many similarities across the two case studies. Both principals had been appointed by the DET, rather than the school council, recognising the significance of the task ahead. Both schools had serious image problems within their community and much needed to happen quickly to enhance their reputation. Kate and Peter, who were both strong communicators and

relentless in sharing their message with the school, instilled hope in their community by way of their deep moral purpose and their belief that the students at their school deserved better.

Although the structure of the schools was quite different due to their size, significant change needed to be managed quickly. Over time at Northern College, the change management was via the school leadership team whereas, at East Meadows, much of the change was driven by Kate directly to the staff and students and she would utilise the support and skill of her staff where appropriate.

There were similar change processes that were undertaken early in the principal's tenure at both sites. Both schools lacked a documented curriculum and common pedagogy, and these were the immediate focus of both principals. In both cases, the principals formed CDT and engaged the staff to build a guaranteed and viable curriculum and identify a pedagogical approach that would best suit the context of the school. Although the principals wanted school improvement across the board, the interventions of coaching and team teaching focused on the core areas of English and Mathematics first. At the time of the study at each site, the schools were continuing to look at ways to improve the curriculum and pedagogy. At Northern College, peer observations were being revised to offer greater feedback to teachers and student voice and agency was introduced at East Meadows to engage students in the process. It was apparent that constant change and refinement was a necessary practice at both schools and was embraced by both principals. Northern College relied heavily on a more structured change management process; whereas East Meadows relied on their principal to drive it. In both cases, the principals used their knowledge of the context to identify the need and develop an efficient process to see the change take place. Both schools were demonstrating slow and sustainable improvement.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to address the two key questions that have framed this research using the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, along with the findings from the two case studies of principals leading schools of low educational advantage on an improvement journey. These findings, drawn together in the previous chapter, identified and elaborated a number of meta-themes. This chapter will discuss these further, connecting the findings to literature to help validate what is already known and extend further on what the current research has found. The questions being addressed, along with a short summary of the findings that will be elaborated later in the chapter are;

1. What are the practices and characteristics of school leaders in low advantage, improving schools?

The meta-themes identified in the previous chapter clearly highlighted the key practices that were undertaken by the school leaders to improve, along with the characteristics that supported the change leadership and management required for improvement to take place. The practices of collaboration, strong vision, accountability for core teaching practices and being contextually aware, required a school leader that has high expectations of their community, a commitment to change and are relentless in their pursuit of improvement.

2. How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in low advantage schools?

In this study the school leaders were able to take advantage of their understanding of the contextual influences on the school to seek greater support and prioritise practices that would bring about the most efficient and effective change. They placed an emphasis on the context of school improvement, but also navigated the influence of community, socio-cultural and economic contexts to enhance opportunities for their school. The school leaders needed to draw on their characteristics of being relentless in pursuit of improvement, their commitment to the students and principal role, as well as their high expectations to ensure they achieved the best possible result. In doing so, the school leaders networked to support their school, identified extra funding to enhance the experiences for the students and drew on their experiences at other high performing schools to achieve improvement.

7.2 Successful School Leadership

This thesis aims to add to research on successful school leadership. With this in mind, it is important that this study validates these school leaders as successful. As discussed in Chapter 2 and outlined more specifically in Table 2.1, there have been many studies to identify what constitutes an effective school. This considerable research shows strong alignment between characteristics of an effective school (Dobbie & Fryer, 2013; Edmonds, 1979; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Mortimore et al., 1989) and the meta-themes identified in this study. Mortimore et al. (1989) argued, which this study will support, that measures of school success should go beyond test scores and consider non-cognitive measures such as attitudes, behaviour and attendance. Whilst both schools have enjoyed small improvements in their Year 12 study score, there was strong evidence of improved culture, student attitude towards schooling and greater professionalism amongst staff throughout the interview process. Other key indicators of successful leadership developing an effective school observed in this study included;

- Involvement of leaders beyond the principal
- Consistency amongst teachers
- Structured teaching sessions
- Detailed record keeping
- Positive climate

Confident that the principals in this study are successful school leaders, this chapter will now look at the practices and characteristics employed by these principals to improve their low educational advantage school.

7.3 Practices and Characteristics of Successful School leaders

There is much evidence that identifies the core set of practices that are present in successful schools These are; setting direction, managing the instructional program, redesigning the organisation and developing people (Gurr & Drysdale, 2008; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, et al, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2017; Louis et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2005).

Leithwood et al. (2010) consider the above to be core practices and they demonstrate how these are utilised in low performing schools to seek higher levels of achievement and ultimately, a successful school. There is now considerable evidence that these core practices have a positive effect on student achievement (Day et al., 2011; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2017) and, as the schools in this study were either on the brink of closure or reborn from the amalgamation of three failing schools, this reference will provide strong evidence of their

use and contribution to the school's success. Table 7.1 aligns the characteristics and practices of principals in a turnaround setting identified by Leithwood et al. (2010) for their positive impact, with the meta-themes drawn from Northern College and East Meadows College. These meta-themes are elaborated further by listing the key characteristics and practices identified during the study. By making this comparison, along with references to other research literature, the aim is to validate the meta-themes identified at Northern College and East Meadows College and seek to add to the school improvement literature.

Table 7.1: Leadership Meta-themes identified in this study aligned with Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010).

<table>
<tr><th>Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010) Leading School Turnaround</th><th colspan="2">Meta-themes identified from a cross-comparison study – see Table 6.1</th></tr>
<tr><td>Setting Direction
Identifying and articulating a vision; Fostering the acceptance of group goals; Creating high performance expectations and motivating others; Promoting effective communication.</td><td rowspan="4">Change Leadership and Management and Collaboration</td><td>Setting Directions with high expectations and hope
• Relentless
• Positive Mindset</td></tr>
<tr><td>Managing the instructional program
Staffing the instructional program; Monitoring students' progress and the school's improvement; Managing programs, committees, meetings; Knowing what's happening and staying up to date; Providing resources; sharing information; delegating; buffering</td><td>Accountability to focus on core elements of teaching and learning
• High Expectations
• Guaranteed and viable curriculum
• Common pedagogy
• Teacher feedback</td></tr>
<tr><td>Redesigning the organisation
Strengthening school culture; Modifying organisational structures; Building collaborative process and a learning community; Getting involved in the community outside the school, and building productive relations with community</td><td>Contextually Aware
• Strong Moral purpose
• Directive → distributive leadership
• Strong vision</td></tr>
<tr><td>Developing people
Providing individualised support; Modelling appropriate values and practices; Intellectual stimulation</td><td>• Building teacher and leadership capacity through professional development
• Implementation of CDTs</td></tr>
</table>

7.3.1 Change Leadership and Management

The school leaders were selected to lead each of their schools out of a history of underperformance, highlighting their reputation as a change leader. Change leadership required Kate and Peter to develop and articulate a strong vision, while also building a strong

team that could bring this vision to reality. The reality of their situation aligned with the change leadership Kotter (1996, p.25) describes as essential for transformational change, someone who "defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles". While not bereft of the need for management skills of planning, budgeting, organising and staffing, as change leaders, Peter and Kate regularly demonstrated sacrifice, dedication and creativity to alter previously accepted behaviours in a significant way (Kotter, 1996).

When Peter discussed the change that took place at Northern College, he often referred to creating a 'sense of urgency' or celebrating the 'short term wins', language consistent with Kotter's (2005) change management framework and found in the book titled, 'My Iceberg is Melting', which Peter gifted to his leadership group. This reference to the language of change is a common theme found across this and Longmuir's (2017) study of improvement journeys of schools in high advantage settings. In each of the studies, school leaders were conscious of the change process and supported by strong visions that enabled their community to understand the path they were taking. The school vision became the foundation on which ongoing change was managed.

During this study, the initial changes required were a directive from the principal. However, there were early examples at both schools of how the school leadership team and leading teachers were engaged to foster change that was co-constructed. This co-construction was more evident at East Meadows College. Kate was very aware of the need to engage stakeholders who would be impacted by the change. By collaborating in this way, Kate acknowledged the need to develop teacher agency which Harris and Jones (2019) argue is important for improved student outcomes. These examples of practices that developed collective efficacy led to a strong uptake of the changes implemented and less opposition on implementation of the change. Collective efficacy is a phenomenon that describes "when teams believe and are confident in their abilities to make an impact" and they "believe that through their combined efforts they can accomplish future goals" (Donohoo & Katz, 2019, pp.25-26).

The vision and direction created by the school leaders enabled staff to have a clear and common set of shared goals. Northern College, as a multi-campus school, undertook a vast amount of change and Peter's approach was to build the capacity of his leadership team to enact the change at their respective campuses. The investment of time into developing a shared vision and building capacity and capability of staff led to unexpected outcomes such as "bottom up" change coming from teachers. This was evident in their use of Curriculum Design Teams (CDTs)

and involving multiple stakeholders in the change process. Harris, Jones and Huffman (2018), outline the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), which are a form of CDTs, as a way to develop collective efficacy for any change. This notion leads to the practice of collaboration, which was present across all of the meta-themes, as well as being identified as a meta-theme itself.

7.3.2 Collaboration

Collaboration, was present across both schools and, as Table 7.1 portrays, was evident through each of the meta-themes of setting directions with high expectations and hope, accountability to focus on core elements of teaching and learning, and being contextually aware.

The shared vision created by both leaders and their leadership teams enabled teachers to help lead school reform. East Meadows sought external help by requesting a department priority review. With this, Kate and her team could begin their school improvement journey by addressing the shortfalls identified. Both leaders wanted to share the responsibility of school improvement moving forward because without this collective ownership, change would have been difficult. Duke (2010, p.94) noted a common characteristic of improving schools is that "teachers are willing to share responsibility for student achievement and learn from each other". This was an integral part of each school's success.

Collaboration was most evident through the use of CDTs. The CDTs, similar to PLCs, were constructed for the purpose of engaging "professionals in disciplined collaborative enquiry in order to generate new approaches to learning and teaching that will have a positive impact on student outcomes" (Harris et al., 2018, p.4). At East Meadows and Northern College, "new approaches to teaching and learning" were seen as providing the fundamental basics of a guaranteed and viable curriculum, along with a common pedagogy. These were lacking when both principals arrived. The introduction of CDTs was not a collaborative process but more of a directive from each principal, as they both knew it was an essential element to generate the basic documentation and practices required. Using CDTs in this way was a familiar path for Peter and Kate, who had incorporated this practice successfully at the school where they had worked together previously. They had seen how the presence of the CDTs at a school enables "teacher-led reform" providing teachers "greater ownership of school and system improvement" and supporting the sustainability of any change becoming part of the school's culture. (Harris et al., 2018, p.3).

What was apparent across both schools was the level of collaboration and the agreed processes that were being undertaken to support student learning. Peter's relentless pursuit of a more

dynamic style of teacher development, saw him aim for regular peer observations to enhance teacher practice. With a similar goal in mind, Kate invited students to provide feedback to teachers at East Meadows on their practice. The school improvement journey for both schools can be genuinely described as working and thinking "at the forefront of educational reform and co-constructing change" (Harris & Jones, 2019, p.123). Harris et al. (2018, p.1) argue that developing CDTs within the school, or across schools, generate "collective action and collaborative agency" and are the way schools need to move towards to lead educational reform.

Timperley, Kaser and Halbert's (2014) professional learning model, the spiral of inquiry, learning and action would support this stage of the school's improvement journey. This model requires teachers to move beyond professional development to professional learning, a shift whereby teachers are not told what they need to know based on someone else's belief, but they learn what they need based on their students' evidence of learning. An extreme example of this thinking was evident in one of the high educational advantage schools studied by Longmuir (2017). Staff in this particular school were directed to focus on ways to develop student agency at the expense of their own professional development. This highly innovative practice was a far cry from the more traditional approaches being undertaken by the leaders in the low educational advantage settings in this study.

The significant shift for the teachers at Northern College and East Meadows College, who have received many directives from their school leaders, especially early in their tenure, would be the move from what Timperley et al. (2014) describe as routine teaching expertise to adaptive teaching expertise. Routine expertise is the ability to deliver practices that have been effective in the past and can continue to be monitored according to their effectiveness within a stable environment; whereas, adaptive expertise is most beneficial in environments that are in constant change or consist of complexities because of the diversity of its learners (Timperley et al., 2014). Each expertise is needed. However, a teacher who can adapt their teaching to a classroom with diverse needs is most beneficial, particularly with the diversity of learners encountered in a challenging school context. Peter and Kate have developed the structures in their CDTs, as well as school leadership teams, to be completely focused on raising achievement, building capacity of staff, developing relationships and being informed by data. These are all essential ingredients to incorporate Timperley et al. (2014) spiral of inquiry, learning and action.

The interaction of context and leadership will be discussed later in this chapter. However, it is important to note in this section that a particular strength of both principals was their ability to network. This included strong working relationships with local businesses, organisations and government officials. They sought external agencies and experts to develop the people in their respective organisations. Navigating their school contexts with a desire to collaborate led to many opportunities for both schools that may otherwise never have happened. Both principals understood the power of collaboration and leveraged this to enhance opportunities for school improvement, particularly to create tailored pathways to employment for many of their students who would not proceed to tertiary education.

7.3.3 Setting directions with high expectations and hope

Northern College and East Meadows College had principals that demonstrated strong communication skills. This skill came to the fore when setting and communicating their vision to their community. The schools had experienced much disorder and failure and for the sake of survival in the case of East Meadows College and re-establishment for Northern College, the communities needed a principal with a strong vision and a clear purpose. As a result of Kate and Peter's strength in this area, both communities demonstrated strong evidence of hope; hope for the future of the school and hope in the students' futures as they "convince(d) all or most of those within the school and the community that their vision is worth sharing and pursuing" (Leithwood et al., 2010, p. 99).

Hope fostering, as Walker (2006) explains, is a crucial part of school success. Walker (2006, p.548) argues that "having a sense of purpose or meaning that is personally significant has the power to grant the possessors hope" and therefore gives students reason to believe their best interests and aspirations are being supported. By instilling hope into the vision and direction of the school, the school community can believe the "future can be different from the past" (Walker, 2006, p.549); a statement that resonates strongly in challenging contexts. Walker (2006) drew on the research of Dufault and Martocchio (1985), who researched the generalised nature of hope on terminally ill patients to better understand its features, which resulted in a model of hope consisting of two spheres and six domains. An adaptation of this table has been developed in Table 7.2 to demonstrate how hope was an integral part of the improvement

Table 7.2: The presence of hope in the school improvement process. Adapted from Dufault and Martocchio (1985) in Walker (2006).

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3"><u>Spheres of hope</u>
Generalised Hope
Keeps one from despair. Empowers people to work for something because it is significant, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

Particularised Hope
The idea that something can be improved and that this can be achieved with the resources one has at their disposal.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Domains</td><td>Northern College</td><td>East Meadows College</td></tr>
<tr><td>Affective - When people see evidence their hope is supported, confidence increases and they feel trusted and more optimistic.</td><td>Peter relied on evidence and often referred to data. He began with the lack of attendance and achievement to highlight the urgency of the situation. He also used data to provide hope, i.e. the aim of two years of learning in one.</td><td>When developing a common pedagogy for the school, teachers visited other ‘like’ schools to observe what is possible. From these visits, they collaboratively developed a pedagogy they believed would best suit their context.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Contextual - The life circumstances of one’s experience. The person who decides to hope bases it on his or her reality.</td><td colspan="2">Both leaders attended low advantage schools as high school students. They each had experience in low advantage settings before leading Northern College and East Meadows College. They shared their experience with the school community to build trust and commitment to a better future.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Temporal - is directed to the future but is also influenced by the past and present experiences. Hope draws on the past, experienced in the present and is aimed at the future.</td><td colspan="2">Both leaders drew from their experience together at their previous school to develop similar structures and instill similar practices they had had success with, i.e. CDTs, strong leadership teams, explicit documentation of processes to support staff induction and sustainability of practices throughout the school.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Affiliative - meaningful relationships beyond self. By communicating positive expectations and by exhibiting confidence in a person’s ability to overcome difficulties, one person can influence another’s hope.</td><td>Peter mentored his Principal Class team to build their capacity through regular meetings addressing aspects of leadership development in order for his leadership team to lead their respective campuses.</td><td>Kate advocated for a student centred approach, inclusive of all. She developed a strong student voice in the school community, and greater evidence of student leadership. All staff committed to the student-centred practices.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Behavioural - involves the psychological, physical, religious and social actions to achieve hope. Hopeful persons/ communities incorporate coping strategies within their stress-filled contexts and tend to attain goals because of resilient dispositions</td><td>Peter’s experience and confidence built a level of resilience necessary in his position. He was relentless in his approach and steely in his resolve. He achieved outcomes by working tirelessly with his Principal Class to ensure momentum was maintained.</td><td>Kate utilised a mentor/coach to discuss current issues being faced and to brainstorm possible solutions. The mentor was an experienced school principal with experience in a school facing similar challenges.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Cognitive - Look at the issues with rational eyes and consider resources and limitations as these affect our desired ends</td><td colspan="2">Both schools’ leadership team collaborated to develop a vision to achieve school improvement. They developed and reviewed goals, constructed realistic solutions to achieve these goals and considered the implementation process for each change initiative.</td></tr>
</table>

process at both schools, born from the development of a clear vision and motivation to achieve great success.

The two spheres of hope, particularised and generalised, identified in Table 7.2 highlight how important it is to instill hope in a community faced with educational disadvantage. Peter and Kate made clear to the community how the school was enhancing the learning opportunities for its students. Their visions communicated significant goals (generalised hope) and they provided the detail on how they had the capacity to deliver on these (particularised hope). It was Peter and Kate's moral purpose that would provide the relentless drive to work towards their vision for the school and "lead for a purpose greater than one's own career ambitions and ego needs" (Duke, 2015, p.18). Peter and Kate could have chosen any number of leadership positions with less challenging contexts. However they were motivated to provide strong leadership for social justice to ensure an equal access to education for all of their students. Peter was particularly passionate about attracting quality teachers to ensure he was "evening it up for the kids" to give them "a chance in life". Kate wanted her students to have "employability skills". Their relentless pursuit of the best teachers and network connections was synonymous with their approach to succeed.

The six domains of hope in Table 7.2 specifically identifies how the school leader built 'particularised hope' in the community by demonstrating characteristics or implementing a practice. This was particularly evident in the Affiliative, Cognitive and Temporal domains.

The Affiliative domain saw the leader at each school enable others by developing strong relationships that built trust and a sense of confidence. This was evident through the mentoring, professional development, student centred practices and student leadership which were the foundations on which hope manifested itself within each community.

The Temporal domain saw the principal identify initial challenges and provide a pathway forward, by either respecting the collective knowledge of the staff in finding a solution or developing a sense of urgency for change to happen immediately. By drawing on their previous professional experiences, Peter and Kate had a clear vision for the school and needed to delicately balance the best outcomes for students and the speed at which these could be delivered.

The Cognitive domain used the collective expertise of the leadership teams to develop a school improvement plan. This collaborative experience added to the rise in hope and the weight of support for improvement to take place. Discussed in more detail later in this chapter is the force of collective teacher efficacy (CTE), which these experiences helped create.

The transformation of the schools in this study from places of despair to places of significance for its students began with a cycle of hope where teachers and students were empowered with evidence of success that motivated them to achieve more. Hope itself was never going to be enough, but hope combined with strong educational leadership proved to be a solid foundation on which improvement could take place.

7.3.4 Accountability to focus on core elements of teaching and learning

Initially, student engagement at the schools was poor as shown by low attendance, large numbers of suspensions, and an overall sense of disorder. Student engagement is important for student success, yet teachers at both schools did not seem to have the capacity and/or the desire to address this (Goss, Sonneman & Griffiths, 2017). There are two significant ways student engagement can be enhanced; through the improvement of teaching practices and through the learning experiences for the student.

To enhance student engagement, provide motivation and the necessary support for change, both schools required a strong instructional and transformational leader. Marks and Printy (2003) combined these leadership styles to coin the phrase, 'integrated leadership'. Kate and Peter demonstrated integrated leadership by working on staff and community motivation whilst also employing "close-to-the-classroom" leadership practices to focus on improving curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Leithwood et al, 2010, p.156). These practices outlined by Leithwood et al. (2010) were evidenced by;

- Identifying teachers that have the capacity to make a difference in a challenging context.
- Identifying evidence of student learning and using this to inform decisions.
- Protecting staff from any distractions that take them away from their work in the classroom.

Complementing this integrated leadership style, Kate and Peter demonstrated a collaborative leadership style, which is evident when leaders combine and use their collective skills and understandings to contribute to the achievement and performance of the organisation (Harris, 2006). Evidence of a collaborative leadership style included;

- collaboration with external experts to ensure an appropriate curriculum was being taught.
- Use of CDTs to construct a scope and sequence of skills and knowledge to be taught
- improve staff accountability and offer support through the use of ongoing coaching, peer observations and team teaching

By using an integrated and collaborative leadership style, the school developed structures that supported teachers to build their capacity in the construction and the delivery of the curriculum. Through the use of coaches and team teaching, Peter and Kate looked to improve their schools through the leadership of others. Harris and Muijs (2004, p.53) see this as essential in schools that seek to build an environment conducive to change and improvement, whereby the "review of a teacher's instructional behaviour by colleagues is the norm". These examples of collaborative leadership demonstrated by Peter and Kate were utilising the skills and knowledge of a vast number of staff, particularly those with curriculum leadership roles, and developing structures to enhance the capacity of all teachers in the school. The use of CDTs, whereby staff remained grouped with teachers who taught subjects under the same faculty umbrella, enabled curriculum planning, assessment development and moderation to take place on an ongoing basis and supported the sustainability of the practices being developed at both schools. The use of collaborative practices in this way reflected the socio-cultural norms whereby collegial relationships are valued and there is high trust between teachers and school leaders (Hallinger, 2016). This practice is recognised as a key characteristic of effective professional learning by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), where it is seen as an essential ingredient of a successful school in Australia (AITSL, n.d.).

These schools also enhanced student engagement through student centred learning experiences. This evidence of teachers' positive and inclusive attitudes towards students complements the students' growing desire at both schools for leadership, voice and agency. This was most recognisable at East Meadows, where student voice was becoming more apparent in the daily interactions and communications of school life (Rudduck & Flutter, 2003). The school had embraced a practice guide provided by the state government that was aimed at creating the conditions and employing practices that help "develop the behaviours, attitudes and learning environments that are conducive to student voice, agency and leadership" (DET, 2018, p.6). As well as being an integral part of the improvement journey, by embracing this approach, East Meadows was committed to empowering all students to learn and achieve and therefore bring "equity and excellence to the learning experience of every student" DET (2018, p.10). Such an example of heightening student engagement in what they are learning and how they are learning has, according to Hattie (2008), a significant effect size on their achievement by way of students being more purposefully involved in the learning process.

7.4 Section Summary

This section has highlighted a suite of practices and characteristics that were identified in school leaders of low educational advantage schools on an improvement journey. Whilst similarities can be found with the core practices of successful leaders found in abundance across educational research, there are also some differences to note. Worthy of highlighting, is the relentless nature with which these two school leaders pursued their school vision to ensure equity in achieving educational outcomes. Another note would be their drive by their vision and moral purpose. These leaders would use this to overcome challenges to ensure success. Their school vision articulated ad nauseum to their audience to provide clarity, clear direction and a great sense of hope. Whilst hope is considered an abstract idea, in a low educational advantage setting it provides the desire required to change the community's experience from the past and believe something better can happen in the future. On this basis, these school leaders developed an integrated style of leadership, transforming the belief and mindset of the community, while also developing more rigorous curriculum and pedagogical expectations. Alongside greater demands of teaching staff, students were called on to lead, speak up and show initiative. In doing so, changing their view of school and building a greater sense of belonging for them.

The practices and characteristics identified have not been exercised in a vacuum. In fact, they have been more apparent because of the context they were demonstrated. These contexts will now be examined further to identify how school leaders can utilise their contextual awareness to support their school's improvement journey.

7.5 Contextually aware leadership

What became apparent throughout this study was the heightened awareness these principals had of the contexts they were working in. So much so, they could be characterised as being contextually aware. This section will address the second question of this study and describe how context and leadership have interacted to influence school improvement. Reference to Hallinger's (2016) framework of contextual conditions will be made in relation to how the school leaders in a low advantage setting negotiated their interaction across both local and broad contexts.

Both Kate and Peter had a strong understanding of the school context even before they set foot into their new schools. They experienced similar journeys into their roles at East Meadows College and Northern College respectively. Each had experienced their own secondary school

education in low advantage settings, and had spent time as teachers in such schools. Before their principalship at East Meadows and Northern College, they were part of the same leadership team to transform a low performing school into one of the highest performing Department of Education schools in the state. Over the course of their careers, they had both become very well connected through the government sector, which included connections with strong political figures. Finally, they were both employed as executive principals by the DET to enact change and seek vast improvement in their school. This journey into school leadership in low educational advantage schools provided both Peter and Kate with a strong contextual awareness of the schools in this study that they would lead. Contextual intelligence, as Kutz (2016, p.10) describes in the following three steps, can be demonstrated in any setting through a careful analysis of one's environment and behaviours;

- Recognizing the shifting dimensions of a situation or environment
- Knowing what behaviours are deemed important in any given situation
- Adjusting your behaviour at the right time to exert influence when the situation changes.

These three steps require a level of experience for success, measured not in years, but by an "ability to extract wisdom from various experiences" (Marishane & Mampane, 2019, p.48). Kate and Peter's shared and individual experiences had allowed them to build a level of wisdom required to navigate the complexity of contexts they encountered in their respective school settings.

Utilising their heightened contextual intelligence, Kate and Peter sought to navigate the suite of school contexts outlined by Hallinger (2016) to various degrees to deliver on their vision and direction setting. The following provides a clearer understanding of how their leadership interacted with these contexts to shape their school improvement journey.

7.5.1 Economic and Political Context

Peter and Kate's commitment and understanding of the accountability for improvement at their school, added to their workload. They each developed a school improvement plan that outlined their goals, targets and key improvement strategies. Whilst these plans are valuable documents for schools and provide direction; they are a time-consuming exercise that require constant reflection and updating. To overcome the level of disadvantage their schools faced, every ounce of Peter and Kate's resilience and relentless manner was needed when completing these tasks.

This additional time committed to their work could be attributed to a combination of the political and economic context common across both schools They are owned and operated by the state government and receive most of their funds from the government (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013). Funding for schools in Australia is broadly organised between the state and federal governments via the National School Reform Agreement (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). The states have an agreement with the Commonwealth of Australia on state specific actions they will undertake to improve student outcomes that are required to receive the Commonwealth funding. These are reflected in school improvement plans. As a result, education is a significant platform on which both federal and state politicians push their agendas to gain the support of their constituencies.

Kate would regularly invite the locally elected state member of parliament, who sat in opposition, to attend assemblies and events at East Meadows College. This ongoing relationship, as well as the dire state of the school, led to a $5 million pledge towards a facility upgrade if their party were to win the next state election (this unfortunately was not to be the case). Kate also spent many additional hours making links with the community to enhance her students educational experience and develop their "employability skills". Building relationships to overcome the educational disadvantage was integral part of the school's improvement journey.

Whilst there was adequate funding allocated to the development of facilities at Northern College, more money was required if Peter wanted to overcome the educational disadvantage experienced by his students and deliver a successful school improvement plan. To provide professional development equivalent to some of the world's best education systems, Peter sought partnerships with organisations such as Social Ventures Australia to help overcome the educational disadvantage found at Northern College. Whilst Peter's vision for professional development did not reach the desired level, his commitment and relentless nature in which he went about accessing funds enabled his staff to build their capacity beyond what they otherwise would have.

The political and economic context is enhanced within a low educational setting. Each context presents financial opportunities that principals, particularly those with a strong moral purpose seeking social justice, must explore to ensure they take advantage of the opportunities these contexts can present.

7.5.2 Institutional Context

In creating their vision, Kate and Peter demonstrated social justice leadership placing a strong emphasis on equity and excellence and aligning their vision to that of The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEECDYA, 2008) which was discussed in detail in Chapter 2. This alignment with the institutional context made Peter and Kate's appointment as executive principals attractive for the Department of Education as both school leaders demonstrated a strong moral purpose. Their drive to overcome the level of educational disadvantage for their students, ensured school improvement was at the forefront of the school leaders' mind and which they diligently and relentlessly made clear to the rest of the community. A comparison of the vision from each school highlights Duke's (2015, p. 19) claim of the vision being context specific, as it "involves determining a direction that best serves the needs of stakeholders and then articulating it in ways that cause them to embrace the direction". What was evident at each school was the ability of most participants to recite some, or all of the school's vision, and the level of understanding that the community had of their vision. It was noted that this was the case because the vision was communicated in many ways and in different forums. Along with the vision at each school, were mantras to support the goal of what they wanted to achieve. At Northern College, the mantra was aimed at developing committed, conscientious students who sought to achieve two years of learning in one. Similarly, at East Meadows College, its intention was to highlight the resilience lifelong learners required to achieve success. By embracing the goals of the institutional context and incorporating elements into their own school vision, Peter and Kate ensured their actions centred around equity and excellence; essential in a school of low educational advantage.

7.5.3 Community Context

Both principals had an intimate understanding of the challenges of their schools, experiencing their own schooling and previous teaching experience in similar settings. With this knowledge, clear and high expectations characterised their school vision, incorporating the idea that the students' journey through secondary school is part of a much longer journey in life. The development of the vision was an integral part of the school improvement journeys and as previously stated, used a collaborative process to develop a shared understanding with staff. This co-constructed vision not only ensured shared ownership of the goals outlined but demonstrated an acknowledgement by the principal of the school's past and the teachers' experience in that context. Without this, the community may have felt disempowered and lost trust towards those leading this "new" direction.

In each case, the principal's vision was pitched directly at the community context to instill confidence to know things were going to be different and build hope. Peter and Kate understood that to overcome the educational disadvantage, high expectations needed to be set and their role in the challenging context they faced was to break the "cycle of failure" Hallinger (2016, p.10).

Having developed their strong vision with high expectations, Kate and Peter used a combination of direct, integrated and collaborative leadership styles to support the transformation of the teaching and learning in their schools. These styles helped enhance the teachers' belief in their role on the school improvement process, leading to the development of a more rigorous and challenging curriculum, and a more suitable pedagogy to address the learning needs of the students. With stronger foundations, engagement was evident at both schools and recognised by not least of all the increase in attendance and decrease in student suspensions.

7.5.4 Socio-cultural Context

The increased emphasis on student centred practices and student leadership was strong at both settings in this study. This was also evident in Longmuir's (2017) study in high educational advantage settings. In three of the four schools across the two studies, students were significant factors in the school improvement process. This focus on student centred school practices has been a significant shift in education in the last decade and is driven by the ideology that by increasing students' motivation and levels of satisfaction in their learning, will lead to greater success (Williams, 2017; Lin-Siegler, Dweck & Cohen, 2016, DET, 2018). At Northern College and East Meadows there was strong evidence of student leadership. As described earlier, Kate looked to develop student agency and voice, embracing departmental initiatives that drove student empowerment. As a result, students could "see that their opinions and—most importantly— their actions can have a real impact on themselves and the world around them", which led to more student initiated action (Williams, 2017, p. 10). Such results can help develop what Dimmock and Walker (2005, p.181) describe as an empowering school culture, "whereby a learning environment is created in which students from diverse racial, ethnic and social groups believe that they are heard and are valued, and experience respect, belonging and encouragement".

The focus on student centred practices is having a strong influence on the socio-cultural context in Australia, and it has the power to address some of the challenges schools face as a result of the increasing diversity, particularly in low educational advantage school communities. As we experience an increase in societal diversity and changing demographics, the "implications of

multiculturalism for schooling and for school leadership have assumed major importance" (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p.181). By drawing on the agency, voice and leadership of a school's student population, a school leader's practices will be more authentic in supporting the diversity of its student body. Providing a student voice at school enables all cultures and beliefs within that school community to be heard and ultimately reflected in the structures and processes of the school. This will greatly support the development of an 'empowering school culture'.

7.5.5 School Improvement Context

The school improvement context was the most significant contextual influence Peter and Kate faced. The dire circumstances of each school was the reason the government employed them as an executive principal. By using the labels of school improvement adopted by Hallinger (2016) from numerous studies (Day, 2005; Hallinger and Heck, 2011; Thomas, Peng & Gray, 2007), Northern College and East Meadows College would be initially described as ineffective. An ineffective school is described as "evidenced by poor and/or declining performance in student learning over time" (Hallinger, 2016, p.15). The idea of labelling schools based on their school improvement journey is generating empirical evidence to suggest that we do not necessarily need to consider each school's improvement journey separate from others (Hallinger & Heck, 2011). Therefore, it may be possible to consider a continuum of improvement a school may undertake based on its current improvement journey. To illustrate this further, Table 7.3 will organise the practices used by school leaders in this study within Leithwood et al. (2017) Four Paths Framework and place them along Day et al. (2010) phases of leadership success. By adapting and combining Day et al. (2010) phases with Leithwood et al. (2017) framework, it becomes clearer what the school leaders in these case studies were doing within the school improvement context for their school. Whilst some of these practices were more evident at one school to the other, all practices formed part of the improvement journey at both schools. Included in this table are practices the school had stated it was moving towards or what could be considered as the next steps for these schools on their improvement journey to reach their desired outcomes.

At Northern College, Peter strongly influenced each of the rational, emotional and organisational paths through his significant leadership in building the capacity of his leaders. He built a team around him that were committed to achieving the same goals he wanted for the school. His strong moral purpose drove the direction for much of the change that took place at Northern College during his tenure. Peter and Kate both heavily influenced the rational path

through their directive of each school requiring a common pedagogy and a guaranteed and viable curriculum. Peter undertook the difficult task of expelling a number of students to seek a more orderly environment; whilst Kate achieved this through setting high expectations resulting in a significant reduction in suspensions (see Table 3.11). The need to achieve an orderly environment at each school was highlighted by the DEECD (2009) report which noted it as a precondition to sustaining high performance in a school.

Peter and Kate used this opportunity to re-organise their leadership structures to offer opportunities to those who truly believed in the vision and direction of the school. Focusing on the emotional path of the framework, this builds a collective teacher efficacy, which is a strong determinant of student achievement (Donohoo, Hattie & Eells, 2018; Hattie, 2016). The vision of each school was communicated strongly and staff had the opportunity to "buy in". At Northern College, there was a strong shared moral purpose amongst the leadership team who had benefitted from a great deal of professional learning from Peter over their time as leaders at Northern College.

The organisational path saw Northern College introduce a school wide positive behaviour program to support the social and emotional development of its students. At both schools CDTs were introduced to ensure curriculum alignment and collaborative practices. Collaborative practices were strong at both settings. At the time of observations, Northern College had matured their CDTs from time for teachers to plan and moderate, to using the teams to conduct peer observations. This initiative was still in its early stages of development. At East Meadows, the CDTs were still being used for curriculum development and alignment with room to grow into the area of peer observation and coaching. Both settings prided themselves on the relationships they built with individuals or organisations external to the school. These partnerships were significant in developing the school's capacity to deliver an effective educational experience for its students by building expert knowledge in the staff or offering learning opportunities beyond the school grounds.

The influence of the Family path was less evident at both schools. Although there was some improvement in the levels of parent engagement, there was little evidence of parent expectations for their children's success at school, nor was there evidence of either school providing examples of ways they had drawn on parents' social or intellectual capital. There was anecdotal evidence of communication happening between school and home via a learning management system.

Table 7.3: The practices (and projected practices) used by principals in low advantage schools on an improvement journey.

Day et al. 2010 / Leithwood et al. 2017	Early Phase	Middle Phase	Later Phase
Rational Path	• Developed common and explicit pedagogy. • Set high expectations. • Developed an orderly learning environment. • Developed a guaranteed and viable curriculum.	• Used student data to inform practice.	• Students develop reflective practices to set own goals • Staff move from routine teaching expertise to adaptive teaching expertise
Emotional Path	• Reorganised leadership structures. • Built a strong vision and communicated regularly. • Recruited staff with aligned values and commitment to change.	• Shared moral purpose and increased teacher efficacy. • Increased teacher trust in colleagues and students • Increased belief and commitment to the school's vision.	• High Collective Teacher Efficacy
Organisational Path	• Created a collaborative culture (leadership and teaching teams). • Developed behavioural management guidelines. • Developed inclusive behaviours.	• Ongoing development of curriculum (common assessment tasks, moderation practices). • School-wide implementation of student well-being program. • Time allowed for professional development and common planning time.	• Collaboration with external agencies. • Peer observations inclusive of feedback. • Developing and sharing effective assessment and teaching strategies.
Family Path	• Invited parents to information evenings.	• Developed more meaningful ways of communicating with parents - regular feedback, use of learning management system. • Feedback leading to parents' increased expectations of their children.	• Engaging parents to leverage additional resources for students' education.

By using the Four Paths framework, it is clear there is much both schools can do to increase the focus and direction on developing the Family Path, particularly;

- Parent's expectations of their children's success
- Forms of communications between parents and children
- Parents social and intellectual capital about schooling

The shortcomings in these areas are emphasised by the literature demonstrating the importance of the partnership between school and home to positively influence student achievement, particularly in challenging contexts (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Leithwood & Steinbach, 2003; Muijs et al., 2004).

What can be concluded from the above literature is the principals in those schools had built a strong foundation for future success by influencing the variables that effect student achievement. In each of the rational, emotional and organisational path, the principals implemented practices that would support core teaching and learning experiences. What is also evident is that school improvement is not a linear graph representing a positive trajectory. There are numerous paths and contexts a principal must navigate, some more easily influenced and implemented than others. Table 7.3 is not a finite list of practices that will lead to school success but a pathway taken by schools in a low educational advantage at a particular point in time. Whilst more research in this area would be required, this adaptation of Leithwood et al. (2010) and Day et al. (2010) provides a multi-faceted continuum of school improvement for low educational advantaged schools.

7.6 Section Summary

Peter and Kate enjoyed strong contextual intelligence drawn from their professional experience but also from personal hardship similar to that of their students in a low educational advantage setting. This coupled with their strong moral purpose, relentless ambition for success and a desire for social justice, provided them their ability to navigate school contexts that supported their school's improvement. Each leader was unafraid of the heavy workload of developing school improvement plans and gathering evidence that these were implemented and making a positive difference. Whilst this supported the departmental expectations, Peter and Kate went further to seek support beyond what every school had equal access to. Through the economic and political context and using their knowledge, experience and networking power, they both were able to enhance student and staff opportunities that would otherwise go untapped. The consequence of these opportunities created conditions that "allow(ed) staff to make the most

of their motivations and capacities" and were evident in student and staff engagement levels (Leithwood et al., 2010, p.130).

Peter and Kate navigated the institutional context while addressing the community context through the school's vision. These visions recognised the access students would be given to education, while also providing hope to the school community for a better future. This hope could be seen in how the students were being empowered through student centred practices, which embraced the diversity of each of the communities. By implementing and acknowledging the socio-cultural context shift towards student centred experiences, the school leaders also provided a foundation on which the schools could provide equal access to education for their diverse community.

The navigation of the school improvement context at East Meadows and Northern College demonstrates some correlation in the practices used. It enabled a multi-faceted continuum of school improvement to be considered. This highlighted the similarity in their improvement journeys. Were these similarities due to the educational advantage of the school, the characteristics of the principals or the shared leadership experience Peter and Kate had experienced? These are questions that could only be answered through further research but provide a segue to a model of successful school leadership in schools of low educational advantage that this thesis will propose.

7.7 Introduction to a model of successful school leadership in schools of low educational advantage

Figure 7.1 conceptualises a model of successful school leadership in a low educational advantage setting. It draws from the research conducted in this study, supported by the literature around successful school leadership.

The principals in this study understood that sustainable progress was going to be much harder to achieve than a quick fix (Bush & Glover, 2014). Therefore, they worked towards building a school that can continue to improve long beyond their time as principal. Using Table 7.3 as a reference point, they drew on sustainable practices, that were well documented and which could be continually resourced. The approaches taken by Peter and Kate can be likened to the conditions of sustainable change outlined by Hargreaves, Boyle and Harris (2014):

- Firm foundations
- Feasible growth
- The long and short of improvement

7.7.1 Firm Foundation

Developing a firm foundation first required the principals to halt the decline that was evident prior to their appointment and to build a solid foundation for many years of steady improvement. As outlined in the 'Early Phase' of Table 7.3, the firm foundation focused on creating an orderly environment, developing relevant curriculum and pedagogy, and having a clear and focused leadership structure.

7.7.2 Feasible Growth

Unlike turnaround schools, improvement for Northern College and East Meadows College was slow. Kate and Peter were mindful of developing staff so that long term change could happen from within and to ensure staff were not pushed to the point of burnout (Hargreaves et al., 2014). This focus on feasible growth was supported by the emphasis both principals placed on creating processes that were documented and well understood. The level of documentation supported the long term growth of each school to ensure transparency for all staff and the induction of new staff. In both cases the school principals' aim was "to improve the prospects of the generations who will succeed (them) long after (they) are gone, while making sure that (they) can make things better for the people (they) lead and serve in the present" (Hargreaves et al., 2014, p.157).

7.7.3 The long and short of improvement

To ensure a firm foundation and feasible growth that sought long term goals, it was important that Kate and Peter recognised the short term wins they had along the way. Their quickest and most visible win came from creating orderly environments to support better learning. The engagement of the leadership team at Northern College in developing a vision and the teaching staff at East Meadows to develop a common pedagogy were also examples of a short term win. These actions instilled the practice of collaboration early and resulted in a significant shift for each school. These examples of a short term win quickly built confidence and credibility amongst the staff and demonstrated that they could make a difference in the long term transformation effort of the school (Hargreaves et al., 2014)

7.8 Description of model of successful school leadership in schools of low educational advantage

With this long term goal in mind, the model for successful school leadership in schools of low educational advantage, as shown in Figure 7.1, has four components:

- The interaction of the essential practices required by a school leader with a strong contextual intelligence
- The adaptive leadership required for sustainable change
- Outcomes identified from this case study
- Desirable and achievable future outcomes

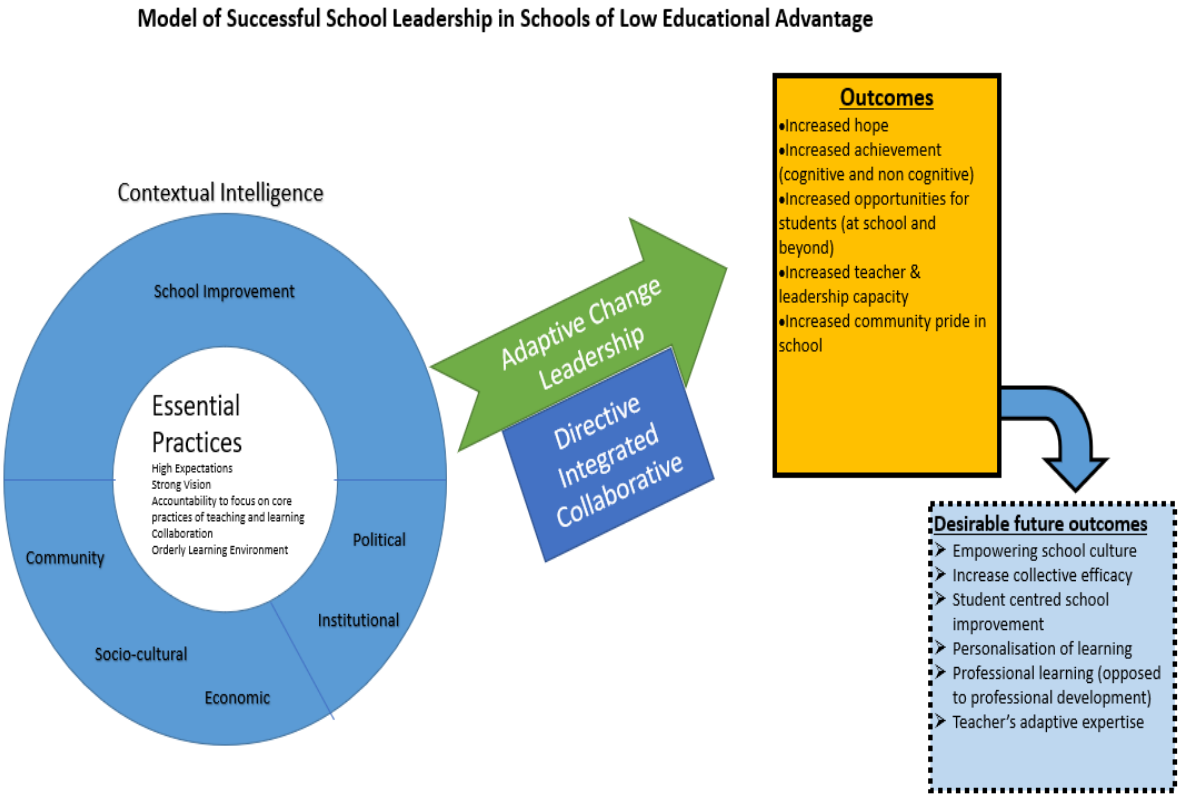


Figure 7.1: A model for successful school leadership for school improvement in schools of low educational advantage.

7.8.1 Contextual Intelligence and Essential Practices

In the inner circle there were five essential practices identified:

- High Expectations
- Strong Vision
- Accountability to focus on the core practices of teaching and learning
- Collaboration
- Orderly learning environment

These practices are considered essential in low performing schools to stop the pattern of failure that has become entrenched in a school's culture. A low performing school requires a leader

who will instil greater expectations on its students and staff that, along with a strong vision, will generate hope for a brighter future for its school community. This hope could only be realised by instilling clear measures of accountability for staff, supported by an increase in collaboration that supports the planning, teaching and assessing of its curriculum. This is essential to ensure the task of school improvement is a collective responsibility and not reliant on but a few school leaders. The presence of an orderly environment is achievable by increasing the community's pride in their school and representing the school's belief in their students through greater expectations on behaviour, presentation and attendance. An environment built on these expectations enhances opportunities for better learning and stronger engagement.

The surrounding circles indicate that these practices are supported by contextual intelligence which includes working with and influencing six contexts:

School improvement: The most influential context given the challenging situations in which these schools find themselves. Attention is focused on structures, processes and practices to achieve the desired change required of schools in low advantage, low performing settings. Principals employed to turn around underperforming schools can be guided by the research evidence to address challenges such as disorderly environments, low academic achievement and low collective teacher efficacy.

Community: This context requires a leader with a strong moral purpose and a relentless drive to ensure the best educational outcomes. High family engagement will assist the school in developing a shared understanding and belief in the value of education and what families can do to support their child's learning. Engaging with the local community will enhance the reputation of the school and improve the perception others may have about the educational experience on offer. By forging community partnerships, students will have more rewarding experiences to heighten their engagement and support attendance.

Economic: All schools rely on funding to help deliver a basic education to their students. Schools that are underperforming and of low educational advantage will require money beyond what is normally made available to address shortcomings even in systems where needs-based funding is used. This is due to a high percentage of students with particular learning needs and facilities that are inadequate to meet the needs of its community or in disrepair. Therefore, school leaders need to be innovative and strategic in seeking out additional funding through private enterprise or government grants that can fund the change required to make a difference at their school. Funding from alternative sources will enable the school leader to support their

change leadership through the building of facilities, the development of particular practices or the creation of programs to serve their teachers students' needs within their school.

Socio-cultural: This context links closely to the community context, whereby the values and beliefs held by the families of the school heavily influence the direction and achievement of the students and therefore the school. A school leader has a significant opportunity to influence the values and beliefs through parental engagement to ensure their school community reflects what the broader socio-cultural context considers a valuable education.

Political: Whilst less of an influential factor in this study, the political context was still present, particularly through the opportunity to develop relationships with system personnel and the local government members. This networking provided channels through which future funding could become available and therefore support the initiatives required to bring about change in the school.

Institutional: Whilst there was some evidence of support for the principals from the DET, particularly to address issues of safety, the institutional context appeared to be one of the least influential contexts in this study. However, each school will need to embrace the expectations and regulations placed on them as part of the education system. Connections to the over-arching goals found within this context are an important element when developing the vision and direction for a school seeking greater equity and excellence.

7.8.2 Adaptive Change Leadership

The essential practices and contextual intelligence combine to provide a basis to develop a view of leadership that has a strong sense of the direction of change needed (immediate outcomes and desirable future outcomes) but is adaptive to changing circumstances. This adaptive change leadership, represented by the arrow, has three dimensions;

Directive Leadership: Synonymous with autocratic leadership, this style delivers knowledge and information from the perspective of the leader with no involvement of other stakeholders. Initially, this style may be essential if the school has experienced a history of failure or decline and urgent change is required.

Integrated Leadership: Described in detail throughout this thesis, integrated leadership is a combination of transformational leadership and instructional leadership, both essential styles when working in challenging contexts. Integrated leadership provides motivation, drive and collective efficacy of the school community to achieve a common goal with a focus on the core business of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Collaborative Leadership: Drawing on the collective expertise of the team, collaborative leadership enables team members to share their skills and knowledge to enhance the capacity of others in the team and the overall performance of the organisation. Collaborative leadership is supported by structures that provide a platform for the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise for greater uptake of these and a broader ownership of the desired outcomes.

7.8.3 Immediate and short term outcomes

This leadership aims to achieve immediate and short-term outcomes, with the long-term aim to achieved desirable future outcomes (shown in the rectangles). The short-term outcomes reflect the findings from this research and are previously discussed throughout this chapter. They include an increase in the following;

- Hope
- Achievement (cognitive and non-cognitive)
- Opportunities for students (enabled by links to local business and organisations)
- Teacher and leadership outcomes
- Community pride in school

7.8.4 Desirable Future Outcomes

The desirable future outcomes are dependent on the sustainability of the essential practices and the adaptability of the leadership styles outlined earlier. By leveraging the structures, processes and practices studied. These desirable outcomes include;

Increased Collective Efficacy: It would be expected that the collective teacher efficacy within schools on improvement journeys will increase. This increase can have a powerful effect in challenging contexts and reduce the burden of a student's socioeconomic background through the implementation of specific practices such as persistence in helping struggling students, organised and planful teaching, spending a high proportion of time on task and to be flexible in adapting teacher practices to suit the needs of the students (Donohoo et al., 2018). Each of these practices would be addressed through the essential practices identified.

Student Centred School Improvement: Evidence from this study and Longmuir's (2017) research suggests that greater opportunities may exist for school improvement that considers student centred practices to increase student engagement. Evidence of non-cognitive measures have been discussed in this chapter stemming from the inclusion of student leadership, flexible learning opportunities and the inclusion of feedback to influence teacher development. Such

student centred school improvement would be central to developing an empowering school culture that shifts the power of change from a “top down” to “bottom up” approach.

Empowering School Culture: By engaging students as part of the school improvement process it enhances the opportunities to develop an empowering school culture. An empowering school culture seeks to value students of all backgrounds by respecting their opinions and encouraging their input in devising the best pathway forward. According to Bryan and Henry (2008, p.149) empowerment in students occurs when “children gain the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed, feel valued and included in the school, and develop a sense of purpose and confidence in their ability to succeed, accomplish their dreams, and affect their world”. The development of a guaranteed and viable curriculum provides the opportunity for student voice in curriculum to shape assignments, as well as provide greater choice of classes and how teaching is delivered (teacher led, collaborative or independent). Hierarchical structures can be removed as they can be detrimental to the engagement levels of some students, particularly those most vulnerable (Zeldin, Gauley, Baringer & Chapa, 2018). Their removal will allow for stronger and more positive student-teacher partnerships.

Teacher’s Adaptive Expertise through Professional Learning: As detailed in the ‘Collaboration’ section, to have adaptive expertise suggests a teacher has an ability to make sense of the complexity of the learning interactions between the student and their learning environment and then apply knowledge and skills that address the challenges that are being faced (Timperley, Ell & Le Fevre, 2018). Not only is the adaptive expertise evident in their practice, but it is also characterised by the strength of their moral purpose. Specific to schools of low educational advantage, attendance, student attitude and the quality of and accessibility to resources, are all immense challenges. Therefore, a collaborative culture is essential to support the professional development of teachers in addressing these issues. With this in place, common assessment tasks, data analysis and assessment moderation become common place, resulting in a more informed position for the execution of adaptive expertise and personalising learning.

Personalisation of Learning: Personalisation of learning is essential in ensuring student engagement and learning growth are maximised. As highlighted in chapter 2, to achieve true personalisation of learning, a commitment to collaboration is essential. The DfES (2004) highlight the need for the school to fit the individual. This is only possible through a professional learning program, such as the one outlined above that places emphasis on the individual development of the teacher to then cater for the individuals in their class. The result should be

a more meaningful and challenging curriculum that achieves academic growth and stronger engagement.

7.9 Summary of Section

This section draws together the findings from this study and conceptualises a model that identified the key elements of school leadership in low educational advantage schools. Given the multiple contexts a school leader has to navigate to ensure school improvement, a level of contextual intelligence is required. Contextual intelligence is evident in a reflective leader who gains from the experience of engaging in the different school contexts, and the ability to learn from these experiences to support future actions. The successful school leader will draw on multiple leadership styles, as they navigate an underperforming school in a low advantage setting. Directive leadership may be essential initially, along with an integrated style to transform the culture and performance of the school through strong instructional practices. However, to sustain the change and growth that will be necessary for school improvement, a collaborative approach will be more likely to ensure long term prosperity.

With essential practices in place and strong leadership, it is possible for underperforming, low advantage schools to grow and improve. Growth may be evident in non-cognitive measurements to begin with; however, sustained practices should result in improved cognitive measures and provide the school with the confidence to meet desirable future outcomes that lead to long term success.

7.10 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the two key questions of this thesis that have led to the development of a model for successful school leadership in low educational advantage schools (Figure 7.1).

What are the practices and characteristics of school leaders in low advantage, improving schools?

This question sought to explain what actions a leader takes and how they behave to support school improvement. As a result of this study, there were five meta-themes that were identified. These included;

- Change leadership and management
- Collaboration
- Setting directions with high expectations and hope

- Accountability to focus on core elements of teaching and learning
- Contextual Awareness

These meta-themes further validated the presence of core practices in successful leaders (Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2017; Louis et al., 2010) and identified subtle differences that supported the necessary leadership in these cases to move their school from a declining or failing organisation to one that has become more desirable as a destination for learning and teaching. With a strong vision for educational excellence fuelled by a deep moral purpose, each principal emphasised the need to develop staff and raise the expectations of all community members, which in turn developed a greater sense of hope and optimism for the future. This hope motivated staff, engaged students and gave parents reason to expect more for their child's education. Staff accountability was necessary to ensure change not only happened but was sustained. This accountability was supported through collaborative processes that reinvigorated the schools.

These practices and characteristics were demonstrated within complex contexts to create the foundation upon which future growth in student achievement and teacher excellence could be expected.

How have context and leadership interacted to shape improvement in low advantage schools?

This question provided a strong insight into how the school leaders negotiated the multi-layered contexts within their school to achieve improvement.

By acknowledging each school's history and utilising the experience of their staff, the school leaders were able to deliver on the mandate for change in the school improvement context and bring their community along the journey with them. Whilst the professional knowledge and personal experiences of the school leaders in this study were advantageous, they were resilient characters, who were committed to equity in education. This innate drive, along with excellent communication skills, helped navigate the community context and provide a clear understanding of the direction of the school. With this vision, came a clear sense of hope amongst staff, parents and most importantly, students.

The community context was supported by the influence of the socio-cultural context, where student centred practice was a key ingredient growing in these schools. The presence of student leadership at both sites, along with student voice and agency particularly evident at one, heightened student engagement and reduced absences and misbehaviours.

Educational funding will always be a contentious issue in society. Whilst conversations that highlighted the lack of equity were common place in this study, the school leaders were relentless in seeking funding from organisations or developing links to local businesses that would enhance educational experiences and "balance the ledger" for their students. The school leaders demonstrated a capacity to address the challenges evident in low educational advantage settings in more strategic ways. Their understanding of the economic context and ability to network proved a resourceful combination for both schools.

For schools in a low educational advantage setting, this study has highlighted the context specific strategies undertaken by the school leaders to support positive change. Through their understanding of the contextual influences and the implementation of essential practices, the principals in this study have brought about sustainable change. It is hoped through the detailed description of these interactions throughout this study, future school leaders do become more contextually intelligent and strategic to maximise the opportunities for school improvement.

7.11 Reflections and suggestions for further research

The value of this research is through the contribution it has made to school leadership, particularly leadership in challenging, low educational advantage settings. What is also apparent, is the significance of change leadership for school leaders in low educational advantage schools. To successfully navigate the complex nature of change, school leaders require a strong understanding of this concept. Whilst this will provide the framework for their school improvement journey, their experience will also provide a level of understanding required to help navigate the complexity of schools. As described earlier, a school leader's contextual intelligence will determine to what extent they can innovate and seek growth and improvement beyond what is inhibited by low educational advantage. Whilst, contextual intelligence will develop over the course of one's lifetime, to develop more effective leaders in schools of varying contextual elements, will require the opportunity to study and experience these as part of a principal preparation course. This will enable school leaders to consider dispositions that will support successful school leadership rather than a set of skills or characteristics. Therefore, principals can consider adapting or modifying practices to the context they find themselves in. Similar to Hallinger's (2016) suggestions for principals, the opportunity to explore case studies, like this one and engage in problem based learning, would provide essential experience for principals to navigate the complex web of contexts within schools.

Whilst strongly influenced by the literature review and what research had already determined was essential for successful school leadership, it was refreshing to bear witness to the important role students can play in a school improvement journey. It is essential for leaders of schools in a low educational advantage setting to first create effective structures and processes for teaching and learning to take place. Once in place, and requiring further research, student voice presents itself as an important part of school improvement. Student voice can lead to stronger engagement, which improves attendance and achievement; two essential characteristics that are challenges for low educational advantage schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Questions

The interviews were guided by a set of questions adapted from the ISSPP research protocols. The following provides the questions discussed with the principals over three separate interviews;

Principal Interview 1

Give a sense of your story to this point. This might include your leadership journey, the schools you have taught at and the experiences you have had thus far.

How do you define success? What does success mean to you?

Identify the key aspects/characteristics of the school? Include a description of the school, alongside its strengths and challenges.

Describe the teaching staff? Leadership Team? Include their strengths and weaknesses.

How has the school changed over your time as principal? What has been your role in this change?

What are the strategies you have employed at various levels of the school? Consider changes made to support staff, students, parents etc.

Principal Interview 2

Which of your responsibilities as a principal do you find most challenging?

What do they see as your priorities? How do you express that to staff?

What were the challenges facing the school now?

What are the assets of the school now?

How did you manage the change required to get to this point?

How have you led your staff over your time as principal?

Principal Interview 3

These questions were adjusted in response to reviewing the previous interviews and the observations that had taken place.

What do you consider student achievement to be? How do you know you are supporting student academic growth?

What are some of the key strategies you have used to support change?

What data are you drawing from to inform your priorities and pathway forward?

Where do you see this school on its improvement journey?

What leadership do you see that is enhancing student growth?

What are the key strategies that you have been put in place to support teaching and learning?

What are the school's goals for the next five years? What is going to be your contribution to meet these goals? Who else is going to contribute to reach those school goals? What will be the evidence that you have reached your goals?

What challenges do you think you will face over the next 1-3 years?

Non Principal Participants

The questions were adjusted depending on the participant (leading teacher, parent, school council member, student) to gain their perspective of the principal's characteristic and practices.

How long have you been a member of this school community?

How do you define success? How do you define a successful school? How do you think your principal defines success?

How would you describe your principal's leadership in this school? What characteristics describe your principal?

Describe the vision of the school.

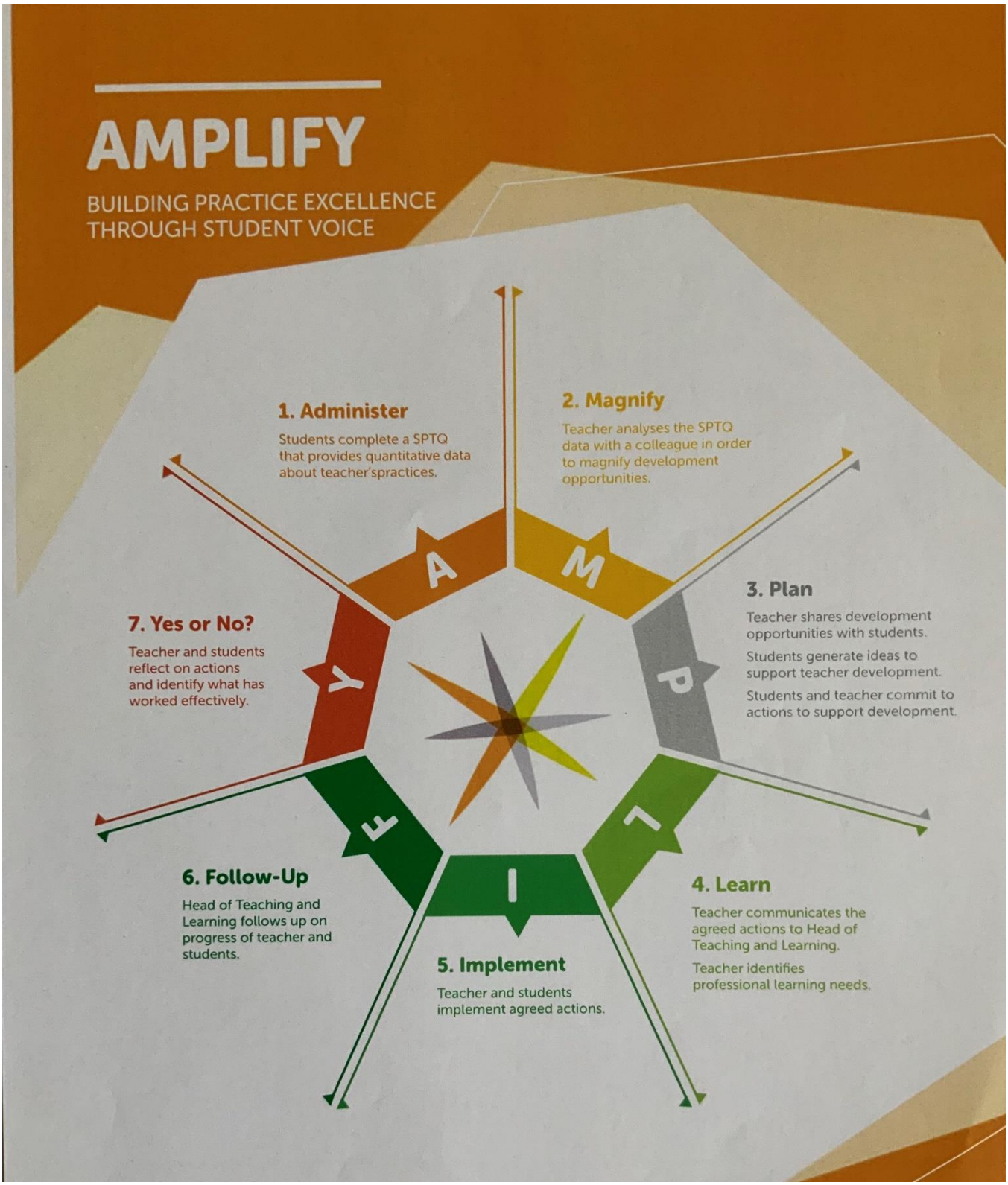
Describe the culture of the school

What is the story of this school? (demographic, challenges, strengths, description of teaching and learning)

Describe the plans for improvement of student growth

What changes are planned for this year? What long-term changes would you like to see in the school?

What has been your contributions to the school's improvement so far? How do you hope to contribute to the development of the school this year?

What are the essential characteristics and qualities of leadership and leadership development necessary to foster and sustain school improvements?

Appendix B – Amplify Model