

A Study into Teachers' Perception of Leadership Practice in Large  
Co-Educational Primary Schools in County Donegal, Through the  
Lens of Distributed Leadership'

Rosemary Daly

July 2020

Dissertation in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
MA in Learning and Teaching

Presented to:

Research Supervisor: Dr. Maria Gallo

School of Business Letterkenny Institute of Technology

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## **Abstract**

Leadership practice in Irish primary education is undergoing unprecedented change reflected by a major shift in educational policy with regard to in-school leadership and management. Through policy enactment there has been a move away from the historical, monocratic system of leadership towards a more collaborative, dispersed, democratic view that is flexible and robust enough to sustain the pressures and demands of our current education system. Motivated by the recent policy change towards a more distributed leadership approach, this Masters thesis examines teachers' perception of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal, through the lens of distributed leadership.

Three schools with a student population of between 400-600 participated in this study. A qualitative methodology was employed and sixty-one teachers completed an extensive questionnaire, three of which agreed to a consecutive interview to ascertain a clearer understanding of the data collected across the schools. Findings reveal that an effective leadership model (agreed by 84 per cent of teachers) encompassing a distributed leadership approach is being enacted across the schools and the key themes that arose in the data were Collaborative practice, Dispersing leadership, Pupil voice, participation and leadership and Renumeration. Further research is warranted in this area to encapsulate a nationally representative voice, and to support policy decision making.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my research supervisor Dr. Maria Gallo for her enthusiasm for learning, knowledge and guiding support throughout the research study.

I wish to extend my thanks to the principals and teachers of each of the schools who participated in this research study. Schools are very busy places and I am very appreciative of your precious time and the valuable insight you contributed to this research.

To the staff and colleagues of the school I work in. Thank you for your support and encouragement. I am fortunate to be surrounded by such a wonderful team.

To my parents, who provided me with the wonderful gift of education and a passion for lifelong learning. I am very grateful for your continuous support and guidance. To my sisters and brothers, thank you for all your help and assistance, enabling me to undertake this research.

Finally, I wish to thank my husband and our children for your patience, understanding, motivation and encouragement. You picked me up in the tough times, reminding me that we were all in this together. I could not have completed this journey without your endless love and support.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and background to research

The purpose of this study is to examine teachers' perception of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal, through the lens of distributed leadership. This research is particularly pertinent considering the recent projected change in primary school leadership from sole monarch towards distributed sovereignty.

Effective school leadership and its impact on the enhancement of student's learning outcomes has been acknowledged by many researchers, policymakers and practitioners in recent years (Leithwood and Jantzi 2000; Silins and Mulford 2002; Fullan 2006; Leithwood *et al.* 2007; Harris 2011; Nihill 2018). Research suggests, that the historic autocratic, top down model of principal as leader is insufficient in leading learning in the current educational climate. The research is unequivocal that in order for lasting impact on student learning; quality, effective school leadership practice is essential (Fullan 2006; Fitzpatrick Associates 2018). Aside from the class teacher, nothing influences student outcomes more than quality leadership (Barber *et al.* 2010). Leadership in an Irish context Coolahan *et al.* (2017,p.188) suggests should incorporate "the principal, deputy principal, teaching staff and where appropriate the students".

Leadership practice in primary schools has changed in response to the current evolving and fluid educational landscape. An increased administrative workload, accountability, legislative requirements and cutbacks to middle management structure has put an unprecedented strain on the principal. In an attempt to address these challenges, there has been a major shift in educational policy with regard to in-school leadership and management in Ireland. The quality framework for leadership and management, outlined in the 'Looking at Our School 2016' (LAOS) (The Inspectorate 2016) document, brought about a welcome focus to the area of leadership in primary schools. This provided a bridging step to aid the enactment of the Department of Education and Skills circular entitled, 'Leadership and Management in Primary Schools (DES 2017), which was subsequently updated in 2018 (DES 2018a) and 2019 (DES 2019). These circulars work to define and assign the roles and responsibilities of leaders in schools, outlining a transformational leadership approach with both explicit and implicit references to a distributed leadership perspective (Hickey 2017).

Circular publication in education brings about change. Change in education is inevitable. To teachers, change is part of the rhythm of the classroom (NCCA 2009). It is a process that requires understanding and leadership. In this instance, it is the leadership approach in the school that is undergoing change. As aforementioned, good leadership practice has a recognised effect on student learning outcomes, and thus the stakes are high when implementing change in leadership.

As the deputy principal, I am a central part of the leadership team in my school. Our leadership team have experienced both challenges and benefits when implementing changes to the roles and responsibilities of team members, and to the leadership and management structure of the school, as endorsed in the leadership and management circulars (DES 2017; 2018a; 2019). The motivation for this study stems from my personal experience of being part of a team accountable for relaying this new blueprint of leadership style, and the knowledge gap in Irish research in this area that has become apparent post publication of the LAOS document (The Inspectorate 2016) and the leadership and management circulars (DES 2017; 2018; 2019) that structure an implementation plan.

Guided by the quality framework for leadership and management outlined in the LAOS document (The Inspectorate 2016) which ‘describes what good leadership looks like’ (King and Nihill 2019, p.63) , the overarching research question this study seeks to explore is:

What are teachers’ perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal?

The sub-questions to frame the study are detailed below.

From a teachers’ perspective:

- What characteristics of a distributed leadership style have been adopted within the school?
- What challenges do teachers face when a school embraces a concept of distributed leadership?

- What benefits have teachers experienced when distributed leadership is utilised in their school and can they envisage any further potentials of such a concept?

A qualitative methodology has been designed to address the questions raised in this study. A qualitative approach provides depth of insight to the issue being explored, in this instance with the intention of revealing particular motivations and decision making, relative to the teachers' perspective. Qualitative questionnaires were distributed to all teachers in the participating schools thus providing a broad overview of the leadership practice within these schools. Following analyses of the data, a sub-set of teachers were invited to partake in a follow up interview to illuminate the findings that arose from the questionnaire.

This study takes the form of a scoping study of leadership practice in primary schools within County Donegal from a teachers' perspective. It is a small-scale study that is timebound, restricted geographically and from a teacher's perspective. These factors bring about limitations to the contribution this study makes to existing leadership research. As such, the results cannot be generalised. This study will, however, be of interest to the teachers and principals of the participating schools and schools with a similar context. Notwithstanding the limitations of this study, it will add to the body of knowledge in the area of leadership through the lens of distributed leadership, in particular in the Irish context.

## 1.2 Researcher Positionality

As will be discussed later in this thesis, the interpretivism paradigm emphasises the importance of context in relation to data collection. Further to that, the positionality of the researcher and their own context is very important and needs to be considered as an interpretive lens of the research. As a deputy principal, the researcher is very aware of their leadership role and recognises how this lens may affect each phase of the research. To address this, the researcher exercised self-reflexivity throughout the study.

## 1.3 Research Site

This study examines leadership practice in large, co-educational primary schools in County Donegal with a student population of between 400-600. Six schools fall into this category. For the purpose of this study three of the schools participated, providing a fifty percent

insight into leadership practice of schools in this context within County Donegal. The sample was chosen specifically to compare leadership practice within similar sized schools all of which have administrative principals, thus minimising contextual differences.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review and Critique

The field of educational leadership has grown rapidly over the last few decades. A paucity of research exists in relation to innovative leadership practice in primary schools at international level. In the Irish educational context, a focus on leadership practice is relatively new, although many researchers including King, Sugrue and Nihill are impressing upon the educational leadership landscape. The publication of LAOS (The Inspectorate 2016) and the leadership and management circulars (DES 2017; 2018; 2019), have evoked a policy change, and influenced leadership and management practice in primary schools. The international and national research context have certainly motivated this policy change, as evident throughout this literature section. Particular to the research questions, literature is reviewed and critiqued under the following themes:

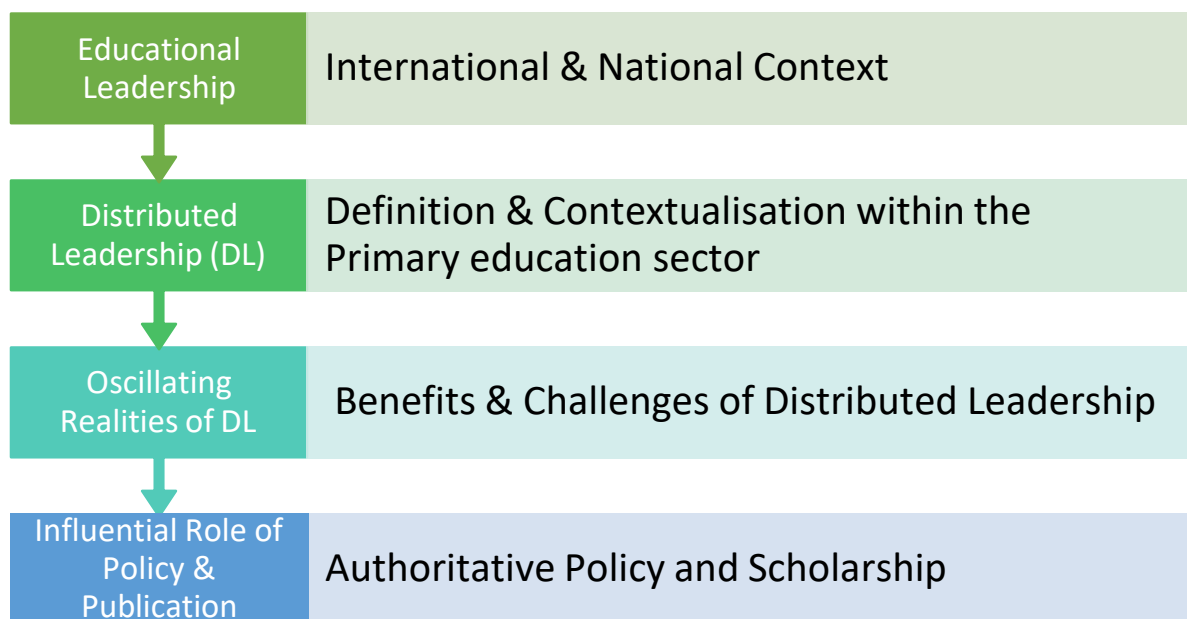


Figure 2.1 An illustrative structure of the literature review

### 2.1 Educational Leadership: Setting the context

Definitions of educational leadership are pertinent to individual leadership approaches: John West-Burnham describes leadership as a “social, organisational and political phenomenon” (Davies and West-Burnham 2003, intro), Linda Lambert (2003) correlates leading to learning

and relationships. Thomas Sergiovanni (2001) argues for leadership based on ideas, values and purpose. The Irish Primary Principals Network, in the report; *Towards a better future: A review of the Irish Schools System* (Coolahan *et al.* 2017, p.101), assert that educational leadership is “discovering and pursuing initiatives that enhance the quality of learning and teaching in the school”. Yet one notion unites the discussion; although there may be one leader, for effective leadership, they rarely act in isolation. There has been a move from monocratic leadership towards a more flexible model, robust enough to sustain the pressures and demands of our current education system (Brown *et al.* 2019).

A drive towards identifying the most effective type of leadership has led to a body of research that reveals a multifaceted concept that demands collaboration. The focus for stakeholders has been on a model that improves the quality of learning and teaching, but more recently one that also meets the changing role of the school in society (Brown *et al.* 2019). Brown *et al.* (2019) outlines the move towards an egalitarian education system, a more inclusive system which extends the role of the leader towards one of the holistic development of the child. “We used to teach courses. Now we teach students” (Petty 2009 p.530). The intellectual and educational development of students combined with their social, emotional and physical development now encompass the responsibilities of school leaders (Reynolds and Warfield 2010), responsibilities that require sharing. Principals “can’t do it alone” (Ancona *et al.* 2007 p.92). Distributed leadership and the value of leadership capacity has been championed by many as a sustainable, flexible concept, which when embedded in a school, can prevail in our ever-changing education system (Harris 2004; Spillane 2005; Youngs 2017). Distributed leadership is one of the “pre-eminent leadership concepts” (Hickey 2017, p.25) at present and “reflects a global policy turn” (Murphy 2019a p.2) regarding leadership in schools. It is this particular concept of leadership that is considered in this research project.

### 2.1.1 The International Context

In the acknowledgement that ground level is influenced by higher tiers (Bottery 2006), it is important to have an awareness of global issues in the field of leadership. Educational leadership is an area that has grown rapidly over the last few decades. Tony Bush (2005) attributes the significance of educational leadership today, to the relationship between effective school leadership and educational outcomes. He references research in America, Europe, Africa and England that concur with this, providing an international context to this theory.

Building on the premise that effective school leadership is second to effective teaching, relative to student learning outcomes, the U.K. National College of School Leadership in collaboration with Mc Kinsley & company, commissioned the Barber *et al.* (2010) report ‘Capturing the leadership premium’, which entailed a comprehensive international review of schools leadership. In this report the importance of a middle leadership tier structure in schools is acknowledged, championing the effectiveness of the “collective capacity of leadership teams” (Barber *et al.* 2010, p.28). A distributed leadership perspective is based on capacity building within a school and the subsequent interactions that take place (Muijs and Harris 2006). The establishment of effective teams and distributing leadership among staff were also outlined as a key practice that effective leaders share. Developing teachers was identified as the largest contributing factor which impacted student learning outcomes. This is a key factor of the distributed leadership concept through the development of school communities (Leithwood *et al.* 2007; O’Donovan 2015).

Research has shown that there has been a move away from the historical, hierarchical system of leadership at international level which viewed the principal at the apex of the organisation, a model of “command and control” (Brown *et al.* 2019, p.459) towards a more collaborative, dispersed, democratic view of leadership. Distributed leadership has been endorsed in this regard and consequently as part of educational reform has been adopted in the U.K., U.S.A Australia, parts of Europe and New Zealand (Harris 2011).

### 2.1.2 The National Context

Educational leadership practice in Ireland has changed in response to the changing educational landscape. Education is now considered fundamental to economic, social and cultural development of society and is a key issue with national planning at government level (DES 2004). In Ireland, there had been a lack of policy and legislation governing practice in Irish schools until the enactment of the Education Act in 1998 (DES 1998a). Since then, a plethora of policies have followed bringing about many necessary changes to our education system. In the traditional top-down leadership approach that existed in Ireland, the enactment of these policies fell solely on the shoulders of the principal.

Recognising the need to share the responsibility, the Department of Education and Skills introduced a remunerated, in-school management structure (DES 1998b). Teachers with



middle management positions were assigned roles and responsibilities for areas of school management beyond their teaching duties leading to a distribution of responsibilities by the principal. This may be perceived as the initial move towards a distributed approach but teaching experience not expertise was a recognised criterion for the allocation of these posts.

A recession in Ireland around 2008, led to educational cuts and a moratorium on the appointment of middle management posts, including those vacated through retirement (DES 2009). This moratorium was lifted in September 2017 coinciding with a new leadership and management circular (DES 2017) with an emphasis on a distributed leadership perspective as opposed to a distribution of responsibility.

In the interim between the in-school management policy of 1998 and the leadership and management policy of 2017, Ireland saw many developments in educational leadership, from organisational changes to the provision of educational courses (Coolahan *et al.* 2017). In 2000, the Irish Primary Principals Network was set up, the Leadership Development for Schools service was established in 2002 and most recently in 2015 the Centre for School Leadership was developed. The development of designated educational leadership courses at post-graduate level enabled many forward-thinking teachers and principals to engage in professional development in the area of leadership, equipping them with the skills and knowledge required to successively lead in challenging times. These developments have had an influential impact on the leadership field, leading to reform and restructure.

## 2.2 Leadership Styles

It can be challenging to identify the main conceptualisations of leadership. Many leadership styles have their origins in business leadership (Thomson 2011), which has become a vast lucrative business (Gronn 2003). This has resulted in an explosion of new categories which share common elements. The standard *models* of leadership can be classified as instructional, transformational and transformative (Hickey 2017). These provide a broad framework which are complemented by *concepts* such as shared leadership, teacher leadership, distributed leadership and democratic leadership. It is considered a weakness in leadership to rely solely on one approach (McCleskey 2014). As a result, leadership approaches have become more analogous in response to the mixed approach taken by most leaders. Successful leaders must incorporate the ability to flit between different approaches in response to situations that arise

and the context of the school they lead. For the purpose of this study, identifying the leadership model is not the focus. This investigation aims to advance the knowledge of the relationship between leadership approaches and leadership concepts or perspectives, and as such provides an insight into how distributed leadership fits within leadership practice.

### 2.3 Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is a concept that is very topical at the moment. It is in “Vogue” (Harris 2004, p.13). It has become dominant in discourse about school leadership, generating interest among researchers, policy makers and practitioners (Gronn 2008, Harris and Spillane 2008, Hickey 2017). To put this in context, in 2016, *Distributed leadership* (Spillane 2006) was the sixth most cited book in educational administration literature (Diamond and Spillane 2016). It is considered to be one of the most influential ideas in educational leadership in the last decade (Hallinger and Heck 2009). Many misconceptions surround the interpretation and understanding of distributed leadership causing “the landscape of distributed leadership to become littered with conceptual confusion” (Latta 2019, p.1). This may be attributed to its “Chameleon-like quality” (Harris 2011, p.11). It is an elusive concept that has resulted in “conceptual confusion and conceptual overlap” (Harris and Spillane 2008).

Distributed leadership practice within organisations is well established but is a relatively new concept in educational fields (Timperley 2005). Although it shares many of the attributes associated with shared, collective and democratic leadership, it stands alone in the field of leadership theory (Youngs 2007).

Central figures in this area suggest that distributed leadership encompasses two main concepts (Gronn 2003; Spillane 2006; Leithwood *et al.* 2007; Harris 2013). Gronn (2002) labels these concepts ‘addictive’ and ‘holistic’. The addictive form refers to the uncoordinated distribution of leadership, where anyone is a leader, and lacks a shared focus. This is similar to what Harris (2013) refers to as ‘task distribution’. This is a simplistic form of distributed leadership and the most common understanding of this concept (Hickey 2017). The holistic form or ‘person-plus’ label that is affiliated with Spillane (2006), suggests great interdependency and coordination between people, with focused, shared goals and tasks. This form of distributed leadership leads to the creation of synergistic relationships among the leadership team.

Distributed leadership can be described as a way of ‘thinking’ about the *practice* of leadership (Gronn 2002; Harris 2004; Spillane *et al.* 2004; Diamond and Spillane 2016). Leadership *practice* is described by Spillane (2005, p.g.144) as “the interactions of school leaders, followers and their situation”. Harris (2009) in agreement with Spillane, ascertain the central focus of distributed leadership is on interactions and the quality of the shared activity. It is therefore not that multiple leaders carry out individual roles and responsibilities. It involves more than merely “distributing leadership onto others” (Youngs 2007, p.8). The primary focus of a distributed leadership approach is on the *interactions* that take place between these elements.



Figure 2.2 Constituting elements of leadership practice (Spillane *et al.* 2004, p.11)

A key defining criterion of distributed leadership is a form of collective agency, where teachers collaborate, share and develop expertise thus maximising the human capacity within the school (Gronn 2002, Harris 2004). All individuals are central to the effective functioning of the group (Hickey 2017). It involves many leaders, some with formal and others with informal leadership roles. It relies on enhanced dialogue within the community and encourages the development of leadership capacity whilst retaining the leadership approach of the leader. As a leadership perspective, it has the flexibility to complement any leadership approach, acknowledging that leaders exhibit varying leadership approaches at different times and in different situations (Hickey 2017).

## 2.4 The potential benefits of a distributed leadership perspective

A distributed leadership concept, enables a move away from the ‘heroics of leadership’ (Spillane 2005, p.143), whereby a principal leads, towards a more achievable distributed approach. It acts as a tool to distribute the volume of tasks and responsibilities that principals encounter to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling, allowing for the sharing of responsibilities across the school community, to include teachers who have no formal leadership role (King and Nihill 2019). This relieves the pressure and workload from the principal and aligns with the present leadership policy in Irish primary schools making it an attractive leadership concept to adopt. Principals are not redundant in this approach (Harris 2011), they play a critical role in fostering the development of distributed leadership (Spillane 2006; Murphy *et al.* 2009).

The role of school leadership is one of leading teaching and learning within a school (DES 2018a), which extends to teachers as learners (The Teaching Council 2006). A merit of the distributed leadership approach is that it provides a method of facilitating on-going professional learning for teachers. It advocates for the creation of collaborative communities of learning amongst teachers (Lambert 2003), with an emphasis on expertise and sharing expertise, creating, as Harris (2004) describes ‘a collective agency’. It is a way of developing individual and collaborative capabilities of the school community (Youngs 2007). Harrold Hislop (2015) the Irish Chief Inspector, in his address to the Annual European Network for Improving Research and Development in Education Leadership and Management, outlined a need for school leaders to establish and foster a collaborative culture and collegiality among teachers in order to enhance and support effective teaching and learning within their school. Research has shown that teachers learn through collaborative inquiry communities (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999) and thus the development of teachers, as the Kinsley report found, makes the largest contribution to student learning outcomes (Barber *et al.* 2010).

Another positive of such an approach is the focus it places on the interactions that occur. It has the potential to be empowering for all involved (Sugrue 2009a), encouraging teachers and pupils to be leaders of their own learning.

A distributed leadership approach facilitates the embedding of policies and best practice moving them from “high level rhetoric to implementation” (Brown *et al.* 2019, p.470)

throughout the school. It encourages a greater commitment of staff by harnessing the expertise and knowledge throughout the school (Sugrue 2009b) thus enabling the staff to have an impact on the running of the school (Hatcher 2005). Through participation, commitment is built, thus allowing teachers to take ownership of the changes in their school.

Hickey (2017), outlines the ability to blend with any leadership approach as an attractive feature of distributed leadership, as flexibility in leadership is encouraged to meet the needs of the fluid educational landscape that now exists. A further benefit is the fact that the unique school context is valued as a “fundamental element” (Hickey 2017, p.32) of this approach. The school context is incorporated into a distributed leadership approach thus becoming an influencing factor rather than what some styles perceive as an external factor.

An unexpected benefit of a distributed leadership concept is the positive impact it can have on staff morale. This in turn Harris (2013) suggests, can impact the behaviour and learning outcomes of the students. The overall benefits of a distributed leadership concept, Hickey (2017) argues, can often be oversimplified and over emphasised. The benefits of such an approach cannot be fairly evaluated without consideration of the challenges it provokes.

## 2.5 The potential challenges of a distributed leadership perspective

The conceptual confusion that surrounds distributed leadership can be considered a challenge to its successful implementation (Timperley 2005). A major misconception of distributed leadership is that it solely implies the delegation of responsibility within a school (Spillane *et al.* 2004). Adopting this misconception may lead to increased pressure on staff members who incorrectly assume responsibility and accountability for the area they lead (Harris 2004).

Hickey(2017) cautions that governance structures in Ireland can limit its implementation. The existing leadership and management model in place in Ireland, places remuneration for appointed members in return for additional duties outside of the classroom (DES 2019). The recent re-structuring of the leadership and management teams as outlined in the leadership and management circulars (DES 2017; DES 2018a; DES 2019), have led to a significant decrease in remunerated posts, resulting in an adverse impact on the size of middle management teams. This re-structuring favours promoting the empowerment of all staff to lead through the implementation of distributed leadership (Hislop 2015). This has led to a two-tier system,

whereby some teachers are remunerated for the additional work and others do so on a voluntary basis, creating a challenge for leadership.

The context of the school, influences leadership within a school. Schools operate in societal, traditional and cultural structures (Hickey 2017). The leadership practice of any school is bound by its socio-cultural context (Spillane *et al.* 2004). Schools in Ireland are restricted by a hierarchical system. Principals are governed by boards of managements and they in turn are answerable to governing policies. This provides little opportunity for real agency (Ball 2012). Incorporating a distributed leadership perspective in schools would mean that change would have to take place from the bottom up (King and Nihill 2019) .

Empirical links between educational outcomes and distributed leadership are not very strong and are considered a criticism of this approach (Spillane 2005; Harris 2013). Much of the research that has been carried out has not focused on teaching and learning outcomes. This may be attributed to the confusion that exists around defining distributed leadership and the lack of clarity surrounding what it entails (Robinson 2008), which may inhibit research in this area. Another contributing factor may be the contextual differences of individual schools: those of relationships, values and beliefs, given that a distributed leadership concept encompasses such factors (Hickey 2017). These variables provide a challenging landscape against which to carry out equitable research.

Establishing a distributed approach in a school can be a slow and painful process (Friedman 2004). It can be a challenging concept for a principal to embed and requires buy in from all stakeholders. There is a need for trust, collaboration and collegiality (Torrance and Murphy 2018) on the part of all participants.

## 2.6 The impact of policy and publications on leadership practice

Current leadership practice in Ireland is heavily influenced by policy development (King and Nihill 2019). Historically this had not been the case until the enactment of the Education Act in 1988. After the recession in 2008, a focus was placed on education as a means of rebuilding the economy and exiting the recession. In 2016 the Action plan for education was published, setting out objectives and key actions, including a plan towards achieving the overall vision of providing the best education system in Europe. This plan highlights the relationship between

the growth of a strong economy and its reliance on an effective education system (DES 2016). Education is now viewed as an ‘economic resource’ (King and Nihill 2019, p 58). The action plan has led to the welcome development of more leadership supports for schools through the development of the Centre for School Leadership (King and Nihill 2019). The most recent policies and publications that impact on current leadership practice in primary schools are the *Looking at Our Schools 2016* document (The Inspectorate 2016) and the following associated circulars: *Leadership and Management in Primary Schools* Circular Letter 0063/2017 (DES 2017), updated in 2018 (DES 2018a) and in 2019 (DES 2019).

### 2.6.1 Looking at Our Schools 2016 (LAOS)

This is a quality framework designed for school leaders to use to enhance the quality of leadership in their schools (CLS 2020). It provides clear, definable standards on two key dimensions of a school’s work: a) Teaching and Learning, and b) Leadership and Management; and was developed by the Irish inspectorate. The role of the inspectorate is one of statutory quality assurance in relation to education provision as outlined in the Education Act 1998 (DES 1998a). Their primary functions are the evaluation of the education system, to provide support to schools and to advise policy makers aiding educational development (McNamara and O’Hara 2012). Traditionally in Ireland, school evaluation has been dominated by external evaluation carried out by a centralised inspectorate in a process called a Whole School Evaluation. More recently an emphasis has been placed on an internal school self-evaluation. School self-evaluation is a “collaborate, whole school process of internal review and reflection” (Kilroy 2019, p.152). It is considered an important method of quality assurance in education (OECD 2013).

This self-evaluation framework has a dual purpose in external and internal evaluation. It is used by the inspectorate in Ireland as an external inspection framework against which inspectors evaluate the quality of a number of key components in the areas of Teaching and Learning, and Leadership and Management, during a whole school evaluation. It is also used by schools as a tool to aid an internal school self-evaluation (DES 2018b).

This framework is an important document as it places an emphasis on the quality of school leadership which is a recent phenomenon in Irish education (Murphy 2019a). A significant aspect of this document is that it “defines school leadership in terms of its impact on learning”

(The Inspectorate 2016, p.7) and in doing so, directs the focus of leaders from that of a managerial role, towards a leadership role (King and Nihill 2019). It views leadership and management as inseparable and not the sole responsibility of the principal. It provides a common understanding of what constitutes high quality leadership practice, making both explicit and implicit references to distributed leadership throughout the standards and subsequent statements of effective and highly effective practice. For the purpose of this research only the dimension of *Leadership and Management* is discussed.

Within this framework, the leadership and management dimension is sub-divided into a number of domains. Standards are provided in each domain, aligned with descriptive statements of effective and very effective practice. Using the standards, the schools are enabled to reflect on and evaluate the leadership and management of their school with the view to self-improvement. This framework has been a significant support to schools when embracing a reflective, self-evaluative approach (Kilroy 2019). An overview of the framework for leadership and management is included in Appendix A.

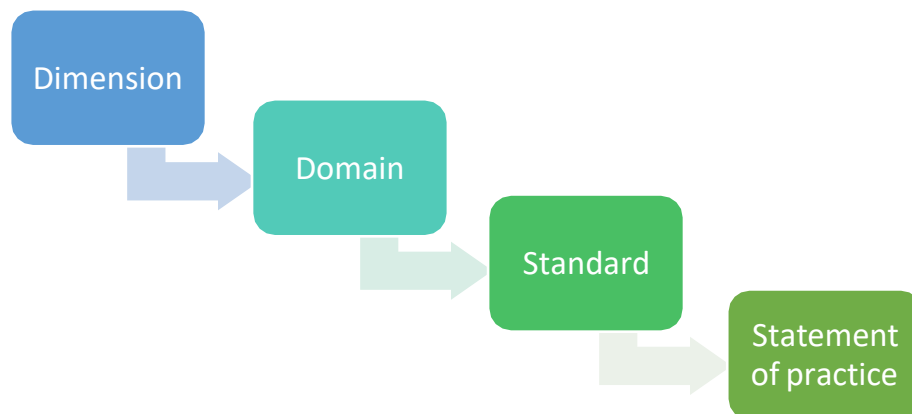


Figure 2.3 Structure of the School Self-Evaluation Quality Framework (The Inspectorate 2016)

### 2.6.2 Leadership and Management in Primary Schools Circulars

A circular is defined as a “written statement that provides information and guidelines on laws and procedures” (Government of Ireland 2020a). The release of the circular 0063/2017 outlined one of the most significant reforms affecting educational leadership in Ireland in recent times.



The subsequent circular of 0070/2018 and most recently 0044/2019 contained minor amendments. These circulars provide a blueprint of the new structure of leadership and management in schools. They also contain detailed information about the processes leading up to the appointment of school leaders but most relevant to this research is the framework they set out that influences the leadership expectations within a school (Murphy 2019a). Leadership is defined as requiring a distributed approach in the circular:

Leadership in a school context, creates a vision for development leading to improvements in outcomes for learners, and is based on shared values and robust evaluation of evidence of current practice and outcomes. In this way, leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for student learning. (DES 2017, p.4)

These circulars reference the LAOS document and advocate the same leadership and management quality framework upon which school leader practice should strive towards. This framework provides an analytical tool upon which leaders can analyse the leadership and management practice within their school and provided a guideline upon which questions from the questionnaires for this study were based.

## 2.7 The significance of this study

With extensive international scholarship surrounding distributed leadership, and growing national perspectives, research in this area is warranted. This is especially pertinent in recognition of the fact that the distributed leadership approach as advocated by national policy, has become a dominant leadership practice in Irish schools. This study examines leadership practice in Irish schools from the teachers' perspective. Given that teachers are a significant stakeholder in the enactment of a distributed approach, it is deemed beneficial to investigate their opinions and perceptions of this approach. The particular context of large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal is chosen for participant engagement as the researcher's own school context falls within this category. It is hoped that this research will impact local best practice, provide an insight from the local level to national policy makers, and as such, may contribute to Ireland's presence on the international stage.

## 2.8 Closing thoughts

This brief insight into the literature provides the reader with a theoretical context that sets the stage for research in the area of distributed leadership. In terms of a hierarchical, logical sequence from the wide end of the research funnel, there is a glimpse of the international scene, which at national level we refer to for guidance. The recent direction and publication of national policy has not only ignited the discussion of distributed leadership but has seen it actioned – opening positive pathways and revealing challenges. Theoretically, distributed leadership at policy level underpins educational leadership in Ireland, but from a research perspective, studies probing distributed leadership in Ireland are underexamined (Murphy 2019b) , thus creating a knowledge gap. It is the intention of this project to delve into the live scenarios across multiple schools to learn lessons and hopefully impact an improved system, with its network of empowered teachers to the fore. The intended methodology and methods follow.

## Chapter 3. Research Methodology

As key considerations in methodology design, research aims, objectives and the resulting research questions are presented in Table 3.1 below. Thereafter, the research paradigm adopted by the researcher is detailed, followed by a justification of methodology approach and associated methods chosen. Data analysis is given significant consideration, followed by deliberation around ethical decision making. Finally, limitations, reliability and validity of the research study are explored.

Table 3.1 Research questions, aims and objectives

Overarching Research Question	Research Aim
What are teachers' perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal?	To examine teacher' perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal
Sub-Questions	Objectives
What characteristics of a distributed leadership style have been adopted within the school?	To determine the extent to which a distributed perspective of leadership is adopted in participating schools
What challenges do teachers face when a school embraces a concept of distributed leadership?	To identify the challenges of embracing the concept of a distributed leadership
What benefits have teachers experienced when distributed leadership is utilised in their school and can they envisage further potentials of such a concept?	To ascertain the benefits and potential of a distributed leadership approach

### 3.1 Research Philosophy and Paradigm

When choosing the appropriate methodology to investigate the research questions of this proposed research, Saunders *et al.*'s (2012), metaphorical research onion visual (Figure 3.1) was consulted to provide a guiding framework. Saunders *et al.* (2012) visually depict the research process as an onion with each layer representing a stage of the research process undertaken by researchers when formulating an effective methodology. This progression approach, aids in the effective design of an appropriate methodology. Considerations must be addressed at each layer before proceeding to the next. Accordingly, the proposed methodology for this research is identified within the field of interpretivism and incorporates a multi-method qualitative approach, inductive in nature in consideration of a cross-section of the participant community.

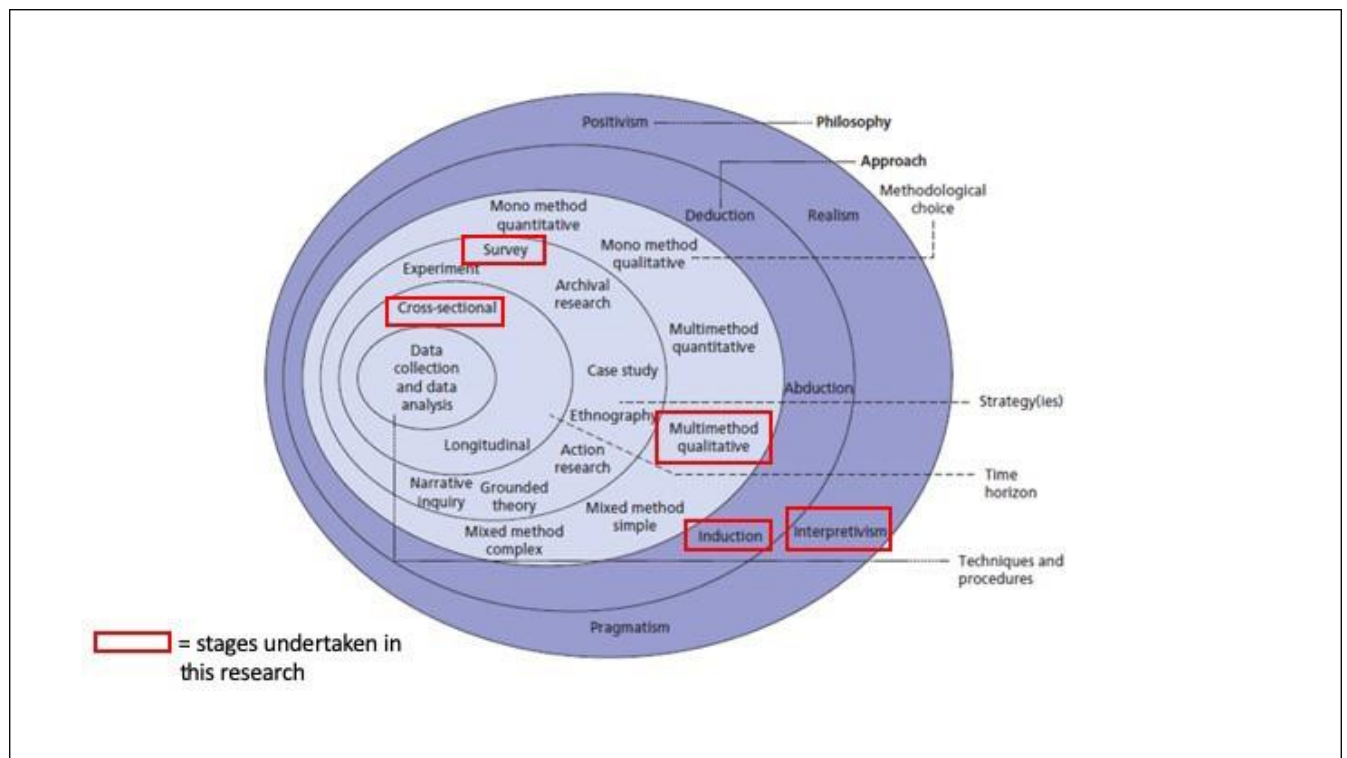


Figure 3.1 Research Onion ( adapted from Saunders *et al.* 2012)

A research philosophy is centred around the beliefs concerning the nature of the reality being explored (Bryman 2015). These beliefs influence the methods used to collect, analyse and develop knowledge. Justification for the chosen methodology, is dependent on the assumptions of the underpinning philosophy of the researcher (Flick 2011). Establishing your research philosophy is the first step in methodology design, as positioned in the outer layer of the research onion.

Common philosophies were reviewed and Interpretivism was identified as the overarching philosophical framework for this study. The “interpretivist” paradigm emphasises the need to put analysis in context (Reeves and Hedberg 2003, p.3) and is concerned with understanding the world from the subjective experiences of select individuals. This study is concerned with understanding leadership from the subjective experiences of teachers within the context of a primary school, and thus champions the paradigm of interpretivism.

Interpretivism draws understanding of a phenomena from the meanings that people assign to them (Goran 2012). Natural sciences’ methods are not suitable for investigating this research question (Creswell 2012), as we are not testing a hypothesis; instead we are furthering our

understanding of a social world phenomena. Interpretive studies tend to be small scale and qualitative in nature. A short timescale for the data collection in this study further limits the proposed research study, thus a qualitative approach was undertaken to provide depth and richness of data. This focused small scale study that embraces a subjective approach may seem to compromise the research; thus triangulation was employed, using multiple research methods (detailed below) to reflect different aspects of the issue (Dudovskiy 2016), and limitations acknowledged.

### 3.2 Methodology Approach and Rationale

The philosophical stance of the researcher impacts upon the strategies employed in seeking to answer the overarching research question. Under an interpretivist paradigm, where understanding, meaning and context are key, this study warranted a qualitative method to seek clarification around leadership practice.

Creswell (2012) outlines two methodological paradigms, quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative research is emergent, the process of knowledge collection is gradual and there is an inability to make preconceived notions about the study (Trochim and Donnelly 2006). The significant complexity of educational settings and classrooms is widely agreed upon by several authors (Elton-Chalcraft *et al.* 2008; Mack 2010). Each educational system is different and includes a complicated web of moving parts (Stake 2013). Quantitative data, has its' strength in quantifying the data and values a numerical stance; thus it would not be suited to this study, as it does not address how and why questions (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007). Furthermore, quantitative methods can be restrictive in offering subjective insight into human learning scenarios (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Thus, a qualitative approach was chosen, as qualitative research focuses on exploring, examining and describing people in their natural environment (Orb *et al.* 2001). Words are valued more than numbers (Cohen *et al.* 2011) in this inductive and interpretive approach. In this small scale study, although qualitative research can be described as a more intrinsic form of research, it provides rich, deeper data.

This study employed a multi-method, cross-sectional, qualitative approach through the use of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and self-reflection undertaken on behalf of the researcher. These are perceived by the researcher to be the most appropriate methods of data gathering to gain knowledge and address the research question given the context of the research

study and site. Data was collected in two consecutive stages. Stage one incorporated the collection of data by questionnaire to gain an overview into leadership practice from the teacher's perspective. Following analyses of the data, semi-structured interviews took place to further explore and establish rich meaning of areas that were illuminated in stage one.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

#### 3.3.1 Research Participants

This study examined leadership practice in a large, co-education primary school in County Donegal with a student population of between 400-600 pupils. Six primary schools in Donegal fall into this category. Restricted to a small-scale study due to time constraints and to further protect anonymity, three of these schools were chosen. Following gatekeepers' approval (Appendix B), all teachers of participating schools were invited to complete the questionnaires (Appendix C) and partake in interview.

#### 3.3.2 Questionnaire

Although questionnaires are generally associated with quantitative research (Creswell 2012), they also have their place in qualitative studies. Qualitative questionnaires are used to gather rich data and information about everyday life (Eckerdal and Hagström 2017). The design of the questionnaire incorporated the use of both open and closed questions and the use of statements incorporating a rating scale. The questions were worded and laid out in an unambiguous, straightforward, logical manner by the researcher to ensure the ease of questionnaire completion by the participants.

Leadership practice in Ireland is currently underpinned by four domains; leading teaching and learning, managing the organisation, leading school development and developing leadership capacity as outlined in the LAOS document (The Inspectorate 2016) and the Leadership and Management in Primary Schools Circulars (DES 2017; 2018a; 2019). In designing the questionnaire, statements of best practice were outlined and grouped within these domains, inviting participants to respond on a Likert scale. A Likert scale gives a range of responses to a statement allowing the researcher to ascertain an intensity of response (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Opportunities were provided for the participants to elaborate on key questions and statements throughout the questionnaire in open text boxes, thus allowing for the collection of qualitative

data. The final question on the questionnaire was answerable by members of the leadership and management team only. This provided additional information and context in the analysis of the data. The questionnaire was piloted prior to distribution with four teachers. This is viewed as crucial aspect of its success and ‘increases the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire’ (Cohen *et al.* 2011, p. 260). It also provided an opportunity to establish a time guide for questionnaire completion. Feedback from the pilot questionnaire was positive and highlighted typing errors that were subsequently corrected prior to distribution.

The questionnaires were administered in hard copy, accompanied by an information sheet (Appendix D) and a consent sheet (Appendix E). The selection of hard copy format was premised on results from an informal survey carried out by the researcher with colleagues into their preferred method of survey. The majority of those surveyed indicated a preference for a hard copy survey over an online survey. Guided by this and eager to receive a high response rate, this approach was taken. To allow for anonymity, two boxes were provided to the gatekeepers for the separate collection of the completed questionnaire and consent sheets. All participating schools were provided with the same style of box to enhance anonymity and the questionnaires were mixed together and shuffled prior to analysis. Sixty one out of a potential eighty three teachers completed the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 73.4 percent.

An advantage of qualitative questionnaires is that they provide an opportunity to gather a larger amount of data in a relatively shorter timeframe. A drawback of such an approach is their inability to capture comprehensive depth and richness (Seale 2011). In attempting to address this, and to triangulate gathered data, semi-structured interviews to succeed the questionnaire were carried out.

### 3.3.3 Interview

An invitation to interview was expressed to all participants at the end of the questionnaire. Participants willing to volunteer were requested to indicate their intention to the gatekeeper of their school. Six candidates had expressed an interest at the time of questionnaire collection, although due to Covid-related issues discussed later in the chapter, this number was reduced to three. A teacher was interviewed from each of the participating schools, with a gender ratio of two women to one man.

Wragg (2002) outlines three types of interviews; structured, semi-structured and unstructured. A semi-structured one-on-one approach was chosen to provide a loose structure and guidance to both the participant and researcher. This method of interview allows for expression of the respondents, capturing in-depth information without losing focus (Creswell 2012). The planned physical face to face method of interview was changed to accommodate the social distancing restrictions in place due to Covid 19 restrictions (Government of Ireland 2020b).

Telephone interviews and video conferencing were both researched as an alternative to in person interviewing. A drawback of telephone interviews is the inability to see the interviewee, to read their facial expressions and see their visual perceptions of the questions (Creswell 2012). Video conferencing allows for this valuable engagement and with this in mind telephone interviews were disregarded in favour of video conferencing. Many video conferencing platforms are available. Following consultation with the interviewees, the *Zoom* platform was chosen. *Zoom* has been the preferred video conferencing platform of the participating schools to facilitate whole school meetings and to complement home learning during the Covid 19 pandemic. Its relative ease of use, low internet bandwidth requirements, recording and security features (Archibald *et al.* 2019), combined with its familiarity with participants were considered advantages to using this platform as an alternative to in-person interviews.

Following analysis of the questionnaires, open-ended interview questions were designed to illuminate and further explore the findings, a valuable aspect of a multimethod approach (Adams 2015). Three of the interview questions related directly to results associated with the statements of practice outlined in the questionnaire, one of the questions sought to further explore outcomes of the policy and procedures aspect of the questionnaire and the remaining four questions related back to the aims and objectives of the study. Unfamiliarity with the distributed leadership approach was highlighted in the questionnaire analysis and to provide clarity, a description encompassing the literature's understanding of distributed leadership drawn from the scholarly research of Harris and Spillane (2008) was read by the interviewer at the beginning of the interview and also included in the interview schedule (Appendix F).

The interview schedule was sent by email, along with an information (Appendix G) and consent sheet (Appendix H) to all interviewees prior to interview. The interview was piloted



to familiarise the researcher with the functionality of the *Zoom* platform and to test its security and reliability.

To allow for the inclusion and exploration of emergent data from the questionnaire, some of the questions varied slightly whilst retaining their core premise and at times further probing questions were asked if appropriate. This enabled a more natural conversation flow, allowing the interviewees to feel more at ease, a feature of good interview skills (Wragg 2002). Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes and was recorded to enable transcription. The video recording of the interview was deleted following transcription and a copy of the transcription was sent to each interviewee for approval.

### 3.4.Data Analysis

Under the overarching interpretivism philosophy, an inductive approach was taken to this research. An inductive approach is concerned with understanding and interpreting the data, a key element in this research study. Following this approach, the researcher developed a theory or rationale after the data was collected which is in contrast to the deductive approach (Saunders *et al.* 2012). The rigour of qualitative research is imperative to ensure validity and reliability of the results (Seale and Silverman 1997). Thematic Analysis was identified as the most appropriate method of data analysis for this research, and through the use of Microsoft Excel, a comprehensive and clear audit trail of the process was created.

The questionnaire data was manually inputted into Microsoft Excel enabling the rating scale questions and closed ended questions to be statistically analysed and graphed. Opened ended questions were transcribed and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which will be further explored in line with the interview data.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to analyse data from both the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. It is 'arguably the most influential approach' (Maguire and Delahunt 2017, p.3353). A consideration when choosing thematic analysis for this research, is its flexibility. It can be used across a variety of research methods and also complements any particular theoretical approach or epistemological viewpoint (Maguire and Delahunt 2017) and therefore befitting of this study, grounded in the Interpretivism paradigm. Qualitative analysis approaches are varied and complex. Thematic analysis is viewed as a 'foundational method' that provides 'core skills' useful for other

qualitative analysis types (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.78). As a novel researcher, restricted by a short research timescale the thematic approach was deemed most suitable for this research. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, outlines clear and concise guidelines, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research. Their framework follows a six-phase guide to carrying out a thematic analysis approach, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

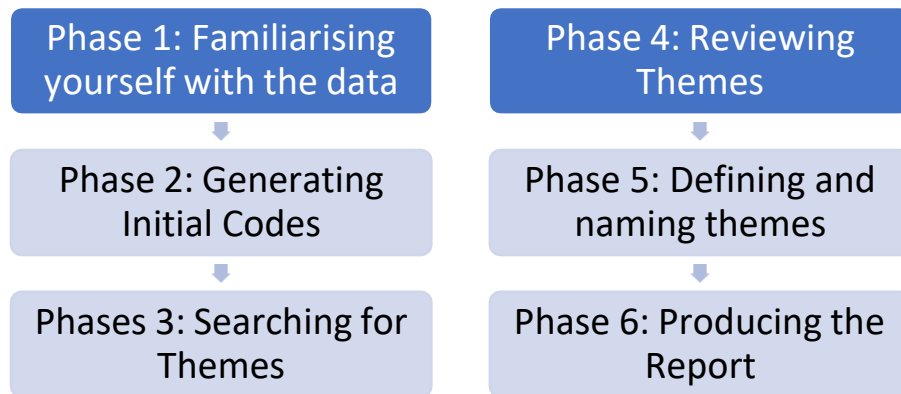


Figure 3.2 Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase guide

Thematic Analysis is not a ‘linear’, but ‘recursive’ process (Braun and Clarke 2006), whereby the researcher can flit back and forth between stages as required throughout the analysis process. This iterative process is outlined in order below, detailing the methodology employed at each stage. Analysis of the questionnaire took place first. Initial themes of the open-ended questions were formulated at this stage. These initial themes and the associated collated data were combined with the interview themes and data in phase four: Reviewing themes, ensuring the final themes represented the entire data set.

#### Phase One: Familiarising yourself with the data

This stage entailed familiarisation through repeated engagement and immersion in the data. Writing is an integral part of the analysis process and note taking of possible patterns of meaning took place throughout the process, not at the end as is the case with statistical analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Familiarisation of data began with the verbatim transcription of the open-ended questions from the questionnaire and the interviews into Microsoft Word. Transcription of the interview took place by repeated watching of the recording, carefully transcribing verbatim, ensuring correct punctuation, representing an accurate account. The transcripts were sent to each interviewee for verification and cross checking. This time

consuming, beneficial process facilitated a deep understanding of the overall data. Reading and re-reading of the data took place before proceeding onto the next step. This included periods for reflection, whereby thoughts were recorded in a reflective diary, a process recommended by Houghton and Houghton (2018) to ensure in-depth understanding.

#### Phase Two: Generating Initial codes

Following verification of the transcripts and familiarisation with the data, initial coding of the whole dataset took place. A column was created along the right hand side of the Microsoft Word document and the dataset was organised under each question, reducing the data into manageable sections, a common problem outlined by Li and Seale (2007). In the column, the data was systematically analysed and initial descriptive codes were identified. The entire dataset was analysed in this way, allowing for equal attention to be given to each data item. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline two levels of codes, 'semantic' and 'latent'. Semantic coding is coding that reflects the most basic or surface meaning of the raw data. Latent coding implies that a focus has been placed on the data to interpret and explain it (Maguire and Delahunt 2017), in an attempt to 'identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations- and ideologies – that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.84). Upon reflection, the first draft of coding of the data set was semantic in nature. As the researcher's coding ability developed following the iterative process of data analysis, the codes that emerged from the dataset were of a latent form. This progression to interpretative form, complements the inductive approach of this research. Throughout this stage recurrent issues became apparent and patterns were beginning to emerge which were noted by the researcher, prior to the next phase; Searching for themes.

#### Phase Three: Searching for themes

To manage the volume of collated data, Bree and Gallagher's (2016) framework for using Microsoft Excel to code and thematically analyse qualitative data was used. This framework was chosen as it aligns with the processes involved in the phases of Braun and Clarke's approach and is clear and systematic in approach. In Microsoft Excel, multiple worksheets can be kept within one document, allowing all steps of the process to be accessible within one document. The data for each question was migrated from Microsoft Word into an independent Microsoft Excel document. This enabled the analysis of each individual question into themes, such was the scale of the dataset. The raw coded data was read several times to ascertain how the codes may relate to each other and form an overarching theme. Subsequently, the data was

copied and pasted into a new worksheet and each code was colour-coded according to its emerging theme. Codes which incorporated two or more themes, were duplicated and colour coded accordingly. After reviewing this process, this colour-coded data was copied and pasted into a new worksheet by the researcher. Using Microsoft Excel's tool to sort data, the data was sorted by colour and labelled according to the emerging theme. Some of the data clearly fitted into a theme and others were, an 'accurate representation' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 91) of a theme, premised on the interpretist, inductive theoretical stance. At this stage the data was further analysed and similar points were combined or grouped and duplicates were deleted within the themes. Each time this refinement took place, the data was moved to a new worksheet, a feature of Bree and Gallagher's (2016) framework.

A visual representation of this process is outlined in Appendix I, illustrating the use of worksheets within a Microsoft Excel document for the thematic analysis process. Only an extract of the coded dataset is provided to protect anonymity of the interview participants. This methodical process allowed the researcher to reflect back to unconsolidated data and for independent validation of the analysis. All the interview and open-ended questionnaire questions were analysed in this manner. The conviction of such a thorough approach ensured that all the data was afforded equal time and consideration, representing a valid reflection of the entire dataset.

#### Phase Four: Reviewing Themes

With the establishment of initial themes complete, the overall dataset themes were viewed in their entirety to ascertain the predominate themes. The entire collated data was reorganised under themes and were no longer viewed as individual questions. The themes were reviewed in context to the data they reflected and the overall research question. It was evident at this stage that there was an overlap between some themes and these themes were combined incorporating their associated data. Occurrence of a theme was not a prerequisite for final selection. Due to the small scale of the research, 'research judgment' (Braun and Clarke 2006, p 82) was utilised and was validated through review by a critical friend.

All of the collated data was incorporated into the themes. Eight initial *descriptive* themes were identified; Collaboration, Shared leadership, Expertise of staff, Self-evaluation, Remuneration, Time, Re-structured system and Pupil participation. A 'litmus test' (Green *et al.* 2007, p.549) of research that produces strong evidence, is the identification of themes rather than

'categories' or 'descriptive' themes as had been identified. This led to further analysis, an example of the recursive nature of the thematic process. The themes and the collated data they represented were further reviewed incorporating a more interpretative and explanatory approach, developing the researchers 'craft' for analysing (Evans and Lewis 2018). Further refinement and changes in the theme names, which were more representative of the interpretative analysis that had taken place, occurred. This resulted in the emerging of the four final interrelated themes; Development of teacher expertise through collaborative practice, Dispersing leadership, Pupil participation, pupil voice and pupil leadership and Remuneration. The arrival at final themes signalled the completion of the data collection, referred to as 'saturation' (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2006, p.318).

#### Phase Five: Defining and naming themes

This phase comprises of two parts, referred to by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.92) as 'define and refine'. The first part is the final refinement of the themes. Through the creation of a concept map, the themes are further analysed to ascertain the essence of each theme, how the themes interlink and their relationship to the overall research aims and objectives. Satisfied with the refinement of the themes to date, the researcher created a thematic map (figure 3.3) to explore and illustrate the relationship between the interconnected themes.

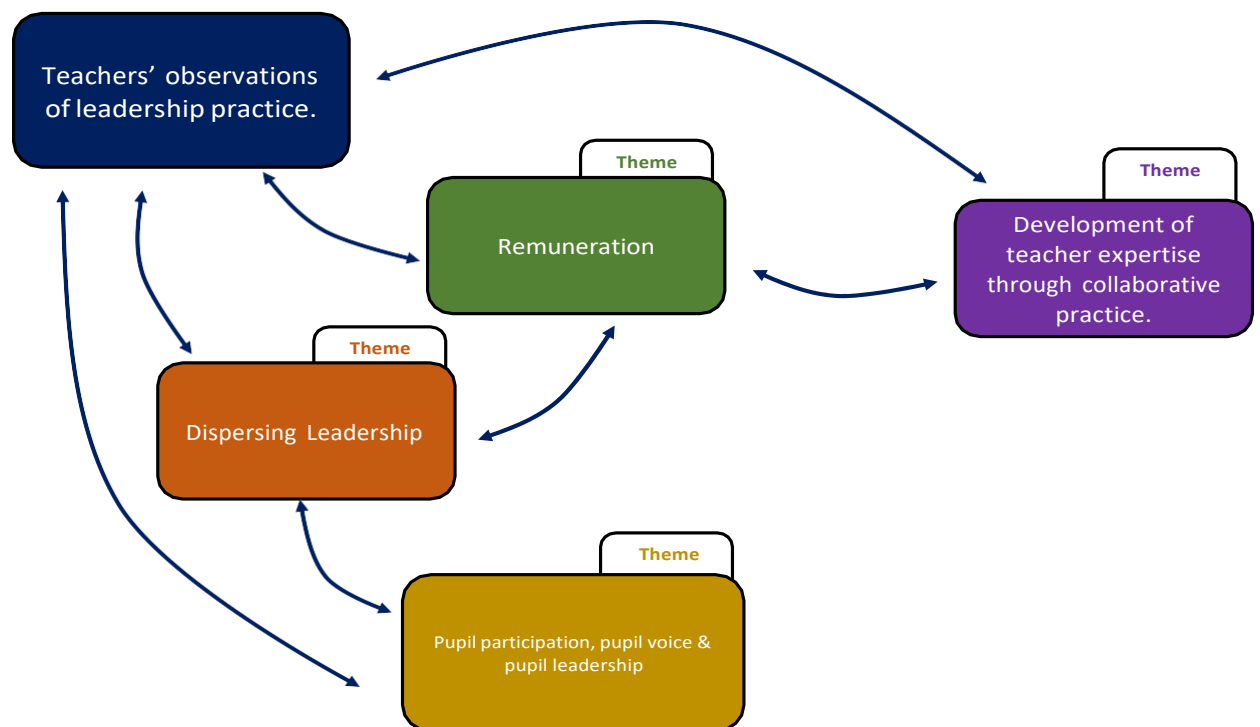


Figure 3.3 Thematic Map

The design of the thematic map above was followed by part two, defining of the themes. Each definition aims to encapsulate the quintessence of each theme and is outlined in tabular form in Appendix J.

#### Phase Six: Producing the Report

This final phase entails writing up the thematic analysis using extracts from the data to ‘illustrate the story you are telling with your data’ (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.93). This phase will be documented in the proceeding data findings chapter.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are extremely important when carrying out research. Research ethics provide guidelines that support researchers to ensure that the research is carried out justly, in an unbiased, objective manner and without harm. Each stage in the research process raises ethical concerns which the researcher must address to ensure the integrity of the project (Hickey 2018). The choice of an appropriate methodology is an ethical issue, in appreciating the time given by participants to partake in a reliable study.

A two-stage approach incorporating a questionnaire and interview was chosen and justified on the grounds that it would enhance the quality of the research output. Access to the school community was gained prior to data collection, through informed consent of the gatekeeper. (Appendix B). In this research, the gatekeeper was the principal of the participating schools. Consent needs to be informed in order for it to be valid (Shaw *et al.* 2011). The gatekeeper was provided with an information sheet detailing the purpose of the study, the research procedures and requirements from the participants (Appendix D). Upon gatekeeper approval, an information sheet (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix E) were distributed to interested teachers prior to questionnaire participation to ensure informed consent, with the clear understanding that participation is voluntary and withdrawal acceptable from the research at any time.

Due to Covid 19 restrictions, interviews took place using the *Zoom* platform. The videoconference was recorded *to Zoom’s* secure cloud setting with the permission of the participants and the video was deleted upon completion of the transcription. An information

sheet (Appendix G) and a consent sheet (Appendix H) was provided to interviewees via email prior to the pre-arranged *Zoom* call. The *Zoom* call was secured using a security code and details of this were sent to the participants prior to the scheduled meeting. The right to cease participation at any time up until data analysis, without the need to provide a reason was explained to each participant (BERA 2018). At the end of the interview process the participants were debriefed on the research commitment, recapping the aims and objectives of the research and to ensure they left the interview in a similar frame of mind as when they began (Hickey 2018).

Confidentiality could be a concern in this research and to mitigate this every effort was made to protect anonymity during questionnaire distribution and collection (consent forms were collected in a separate box to questionnaire). Hardcopies of the questionnaire were shredded after analysis. The questionnaire was anonymous and completed questionnaires were not returned directly to the researcher but to a gatekeeper in each school. The researcher received the questionnaires in a sealed box, which was identical in all participating schools. All boxes were opened at the same time and the contents shuffled, providing further anonymity. Interview participants were given a pseudonym in the transcription documents, and assurance of the researcher's integrity in relation to confidentiality was given verbally, as outlined in the respective participant information sheets. Transcription was verbatim, and the completed transcripts were sent to the interview participants for approval. Participants were made aware that deletions or amendments could be sought. It was pointed out that due to the very small-scale of this study and though anonymity will be used, the small numbers involved can limit the level of confidentiality that can be assured. Participants were assured that every effort would be made to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

Softcopy data was stored on a password protected computer which is used exclusively by the researcher, and all individual documents were password protected and encrypted. The data will be kept securely for 5 years after the completion of the project by my supervisor, Dr Maria Gallo, in her office at St. Angela's College, Sligo (NUI Galway), after which soft data will be deleted.

The researcher submitted an ethical application to the Letterkenny Institute of Technology and received approval. To support and guide my application and to ensure ethical awareness during the design element and throughout the research, the researcher consulted numerous

methodology books and adhered to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2018). Additional university websites were also examined to widen the researcher's knowledge base of Irish ethical procedures and GDPR compliance. The Teaching Council of Ireland also provided a comprehensive ethic's webinar with Dr. Claire Hickey (Hickey 2018) which was relevant to my research.

### 3.6 Validity and Reliability

The existence of a hierarchy in research methods between quantitative and qualitative research is acknowledged by many authors (Smith 1998 in Houghton and Houghton 2018), with the perception that the inferior qualitative research adopts an 'anything goes' approach (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.78). Taking this into consideration, a robust and methodical approach was undertaken by the researcher throughout this research to ensure credible and trustworthy results. Validity and reliability was paramount in the research design, the implementation of the research and data analysis. Triangulation of data was used to improve the validity and reliability of the research and to overcome the personal bias of the researcher (Brink 1993). Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection (Cohen *et al.* 2011), and in this instance data was considered from a) a scholarly literature review; b) questionnaire data c) interview data and d) reflective journal.

In the design of the questionnaire, each question was carefully analysed to ensure clarity and that it was asking what it intended to ask (Saunders *et al.* 2012). The questionnaire was piloted prior to distribution to ensure consistency of interpretation. At interview stage, a pilot interview took place to ensure clarity of questions and consistency. An interview schedule was made available to interview participants prior to interview and was followed by the researcher, providing consistency in approach. Interviewer and interviewee bias were acknowledged and discussed to ensure transparency. To increase the strength of the reliability of the data an established method of thematic analysis was chosen, namely Braun and Clarke's six phase framework. This systematic approach ensured analysis of data was carried out in a cogent and methodical manner. The use of Microsoft Excel, following Bree and Gallagher's (2016) framework ensured a clear audit trail improving the quality and rigour of the research (King and Brooks 2018). Validity was also addressed through honesty of the researcher in the self-reporting of the research (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Data extracts were included to address concerns of honesty and to further support findings.



Researchers in qualitative studies are part of the research environment and cannot remain completely objective (Cohen *et al.* 2011). It can be challenging to remain detached from the research, a limitation outlined by Goran (2012), especially when the researcher is carrying out research in their field of study, researcher bias and volunteer bias may exist. Both researchers and respondents have their own understanding and interpret the world differently. The theoretical stance of the researcher was stated and its implications for this research were explored. Through self-reflection at each stage, the researcher endeavoured to identify and acknowledge any bias or influence that may impact the outcome of the study. A reflective diary was kept, allowing the researcher to reflect on their own feelings, thoughts and assumptions which Snowden (2015) ascertains, has the additional benefit of mitigating against high levels of bias impacting on the research.

### 3.7 Limitations

#### 3.7.1 Research Constraints

All research has its limitations (Martyn 2009). Limitations to this study are acknowledged by the researcher as they present. Contextual features of this study are addressed in the introduction, and the small size of this study has been identified thus far as impacting on the generalisation of the results. The challenges in identifying the ideal target audience, in consideration of the research questions, is also acknowledged as a limitation of this scoping study. Lack of experience on behalf of the researcher may be considered as a limitation.

In acknowledgement of these limitations and to diminish their impact, the researcher undertook a comprehensive research plan over the past year, delving into the expansive scholarship, upskilling in a myriad of research skills from methods, to analysis, to the art of trying to master a reliable and valid academic feat, to achieve theoretical standing and value in practice. In the midst of this journey, a pandemic rose across the world.

#### 3.7.2 Impact of the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid 19)

Following the outbreak of Covid 19, which was discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019, a global health emergency ensued (Oldenburg and Marsch 2020). In an effort to mitigate against the transmission of the virus, the Irish government announced the closure of educational institutions, including schools, at short notice on Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 for a two

week period. This initial closure was extended to the summer break and accompanied by many additional societal restrictions. These restrictions resulted in a major disruptive change to the work and home life of the Irish nation, including the researcher and teachers involved in this research.

In terms of this research, Covid 19 impacted upon the personal life of the researcher, and the research process. The unprecedented closure of schools, included the research sites, led to an early collection of the questionnaires, which may have resulted in fewer participants. During the present Covid 19 epidemic, home and work landscapes have become intermingled for many due to the closure of creche facilities, schools and the requirement to social distance. A challenge of this new landscape for some of the teachers involved in this research was the ability to balance working from home, whilst caring for a loved one. Consequently, three of the interview participants, understandably, were unable to partake in the interview stage, resulting in the reduction from six to three interviews. In light of the current climate and with supervisor agreement it was deemed adequate to continue with three interviews, given the quantity of data collected with other methods, and the fact that each of the participating schools were represented in this process, thus providing a fair overall insight. Social distancing restrictions also led to a change in the interview method from in person, to video conferenced one-on-one interviews, carried out using the *Zoom* platform.

### 3.8 Closing thoughts

This chapter outlined the comprehensive decisions around methodology choice, methods, analysis, and the overarching justification the qualitative research carried out. The next chapter provides an insightful examination of the themes that evolved from the research, presenting data extracts to justify their inclusion, whilst exploring their relevance to the research question.

## Chapter 4: Research Data Findings and Discussion

This chapter examines the findings of the methods employed, the questionnaire and consecutive interview results, identifying their relevance to the overall research question and sub questions that frame this study, detailed in table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Research and Sub-questions

<b>Research Question</b>
What are teachers' perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal?
<b>Sub-Questions</b>
From a teachers' perspective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What characteristics of a distributed leadership style have been adopted within the school?</li><li>• What challenges do teachers face when a school embraces a concept of distributed leadership?</li><li>• What benefits have teachers experienced when distributed leadership is utilised in their school and can they envisage further potentials of such a concept?</li></ul>

Statistical data from the questionnaire will be detailed first, followed by an exploration of the themes that arose from the thematic analysis of the open-ended questionnaire and the interview questions.

### 4.1 Questionnaire Data

#### 4.1.1 Demographic data

Knowledge of participant demographics affect the generalisability of the research findings (Hammer 2011), thus impacting upon the reliability and validity of the research. Question 1 in the questionnaire requested demographic data, providing context to the research study. Sixty-one out of a possible eighty-three teachers from the three participating schools took part in the questionnaire, representing a 73 per cent. response rate. Interestingly, 92 per cent. (11-15 years: 21%; 16-20 years: 33%; Over 20 years: 38%) of the participating teachers identified as

experienced teachers with 11+ years of experience; and over one-third of the total cohort being very experienced (Over 20 years: 38%). This profile eludes to an overall experienced teacher cohort. (Figure 4.1)

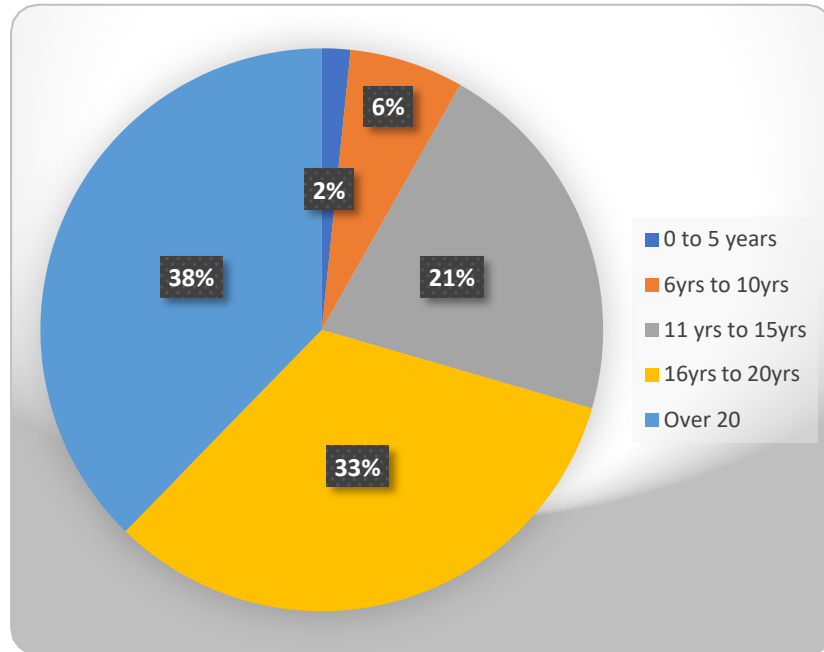


Figure 4.1 Number of years teaching

Approximately one-third of the teacher participant group (N=19; 31%) self-identified as being in a leadership role (a member of their school’s Leadership and management team (LMT)). This cohort of the group are experienced teachers, all of which have over 16 years’ experience and 89 per cent. with over 20 years’ experience. This data reflects a very experienced level of teachers holding a leadership role and reflects the historic role seniority played as a determining factor in selection.

#### 4.1.2 Awareness of National Leadership Policy

Teachers were questioned on their familiarity with two documents, ‘Leadership and Management in Primary Schools’ Circular Letter 0070/2018 and ‘LAOS’.

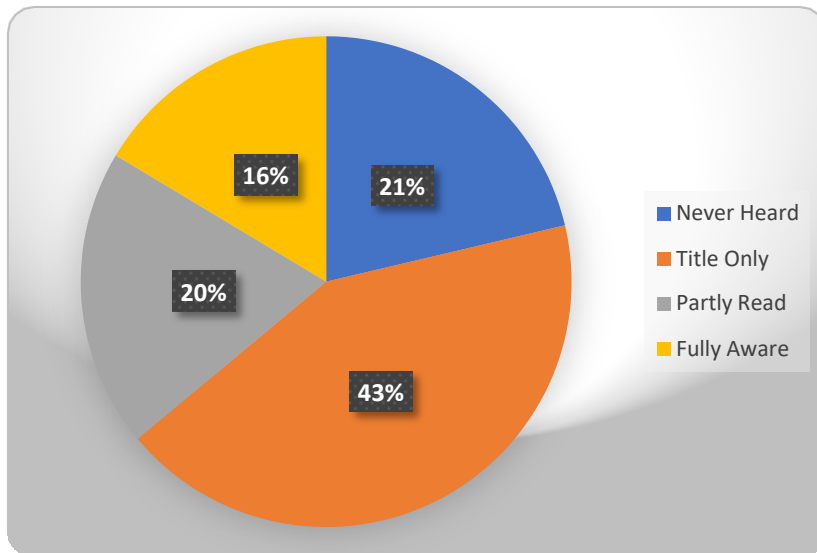


Figure 4.2 Familiarity with the ‘Leadership and Management in Primary Schools Circular’

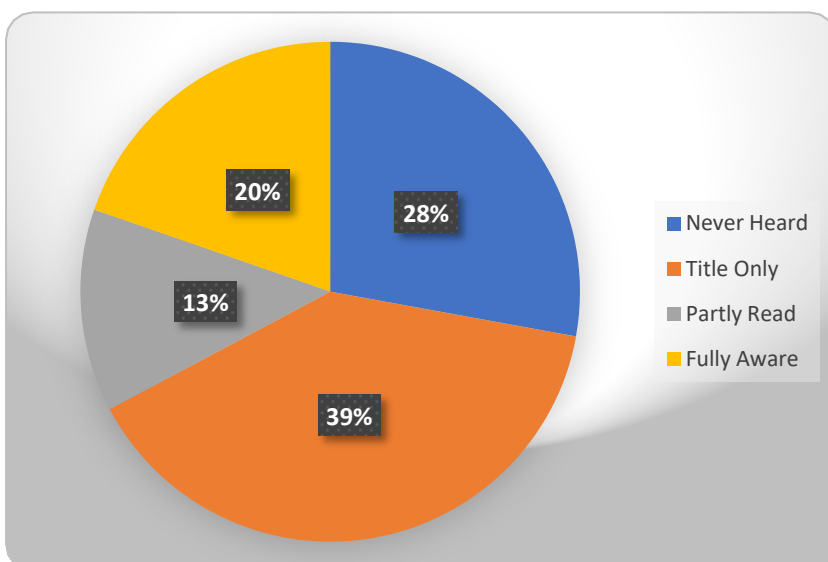


Figure 4.3 Familiarity with ‘LAOS’

These documents guide leadership practice within our schools, making explicit reference to a ‘distributed leadership’ approach. Surprisingly results from both documents revealed limited teacher awareness of the documents. Sixty-four per cent. of teachers had never heard of, or were aware by title only of ‘The Leadership and Management in Primary Schools’ circular (Figure 4.2) and similarly 67 per cent of participants had never heard of, or knew by title only of the ‘LAOS’ document (Figure 4.3). These results were further investigated in the interview.

Through the interview discourse, high content knowledge of these documents amongst teachers was evident. Although two thirds of the participating teachers may not have an awareness of document titles or have read them in their entirety, the content of the documents are being relayed to teachers in schools through their enactment, and through school meetings, yet without formally naming them. *“I see it in practice in my school and it makes more sense”* Participant 3. The contents of the documents are discussed at whole level in a staff meeting through reflective practice, and reading of the documents is also perceived as the role of leadership:

*“under reflective practice we say, What are we doing in this area that’s worked well? If it’s not working well, how could we improve it? How could we bring in this new policy document?”* (Participant 1)

*“Sometimes we have policy documents to read before staff meetings and do we read every single word? We don’t. But we do rely on the leadership to bring them down into smaller bite size pockets.”* (Participant 1)

Time and the academic nature of the documents were presented as possible rationales for their unfamiliarity among staff:

*“time and the curriculum is so busy”* (Participant 1)

*“They’ll [teachers] skim over them, they don’t have time”* (Participant 3)

*“The language used in circulars and documents can be quite academic, so, it’s not something that you would pick up and decide that you would read quite easily”* (Participant 2)

The interview illuminated and provided clarity on the initially anticipated unfamiliarity of the participants with the leadership policies. It is evident that teachers were aware of the content, yet not of the formal titles. A distributed leadership approach facilitates the embedding of policies moving them from high level rhetoric to implementation (Brown *et al.* 2019), a process undertaken by the leadership of the participating schools. This repackaging of policy seems evident in the schools of these teachers, and thus gives some early indicators in this research of distributed leadership representation.

### 4.1.3 Awareness of Leadership Practice

Through the use of a Likert scale, question 5 from the questionnaire examined leadership practice under the four domains; a) leading learning and teaching, b) managing the organisation, c) leading school development and d) developing school leadership capacity. Twelve statements of practice adapted from the ‘Quality Framework for Primary Schools - Leadership Framework Overview’ (Appendix A), outlined in the ‘LAOS’ document were distributed across these domains. Utilising this ‘self-evaluation framework’ (O’Connor 2015) leadership practice within the participating schools was investigated. Analysis of the results indicate that teachers’ are in agreement that their LMT positively enact the 12 statements that encompass the four leadership practice domains, as illustrated in Figure 4.4 below.

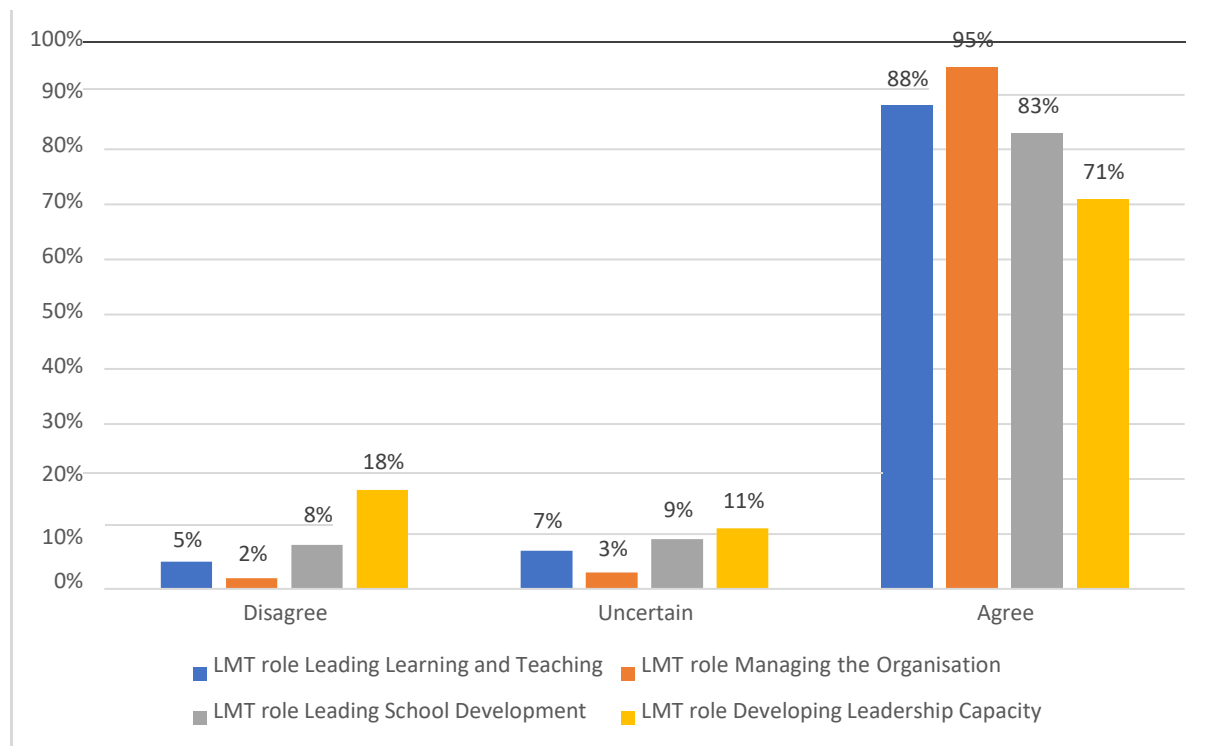


Figure 4.4 Teacher’s acknowledgement with the enactment of their LMT role in relation to the four leadership practice domains

These results are very positive and illustrate an excellent alignment of each school’s application of policy in practice. An average of 84 per cent. of teachers agreed with all the statements revealing effective leadership practice across the participating schools.

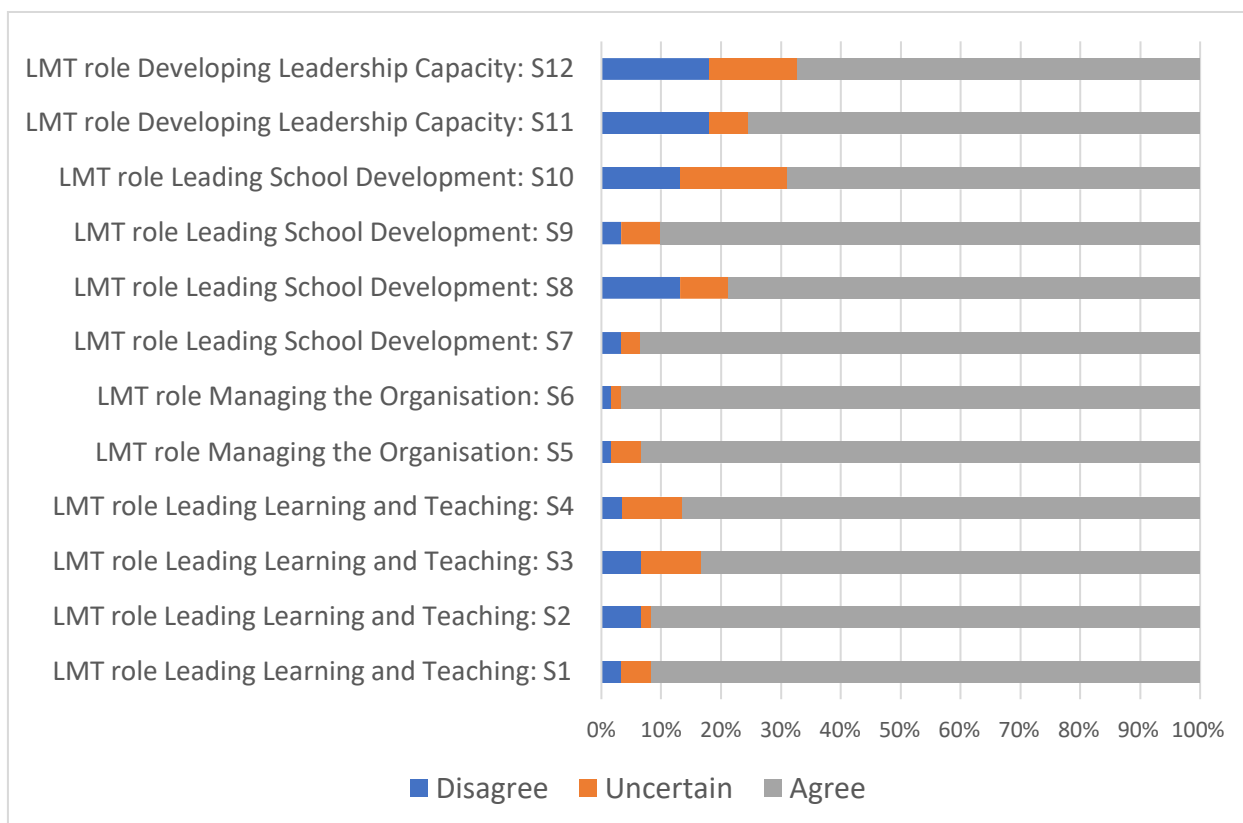


Figure 4.5 Teacher’s acknowledgement with the enactment of the 12 leadership practice statements within the four leadership practice domains

When we analyse the data in a more granular form, we realise that three statements (10, 11 and 12 from Figure 4.5) detailed in Figure 4.6 below yield an average of 70 per cent. agreement by teachers of their enactment within their schools. As such, they were folded into the interview schedule for clarification and to probe further discussion in light of their slight deviance from the overall results. Although they are not singularly discussed, their content helped shape interview discussion and the themes that emerged.

The roles and responsibilities of the leadership and management team match the needs of the school

The LMT promotes the pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership was also explored at interview.

The LMT empowers and provides opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles.

Figure 4.6 Three leadership practice statements that were explored further during interview



The next section explores the themes that emerged at interview when exploring the teachers' perceptions of the leadership model within their school.

## 4.2 Themes arising from the Thematic Analysis

The three specific questions underpinning this research seek to understand the characteristics of the distributed leadership model that has been adopted within the participant's school, and the related challenges and benefits that emerge. Provoked discussion of these issues at interview, and the rigorous analysis that followed, resulted in the materialisation of the following four themes.

### 4.2.1 Development of teacher expertise through collaborative practice

Distributed leadership falls under the umbrella of collegial models of leadership (Bush 2010) and as such a defining criterion of distributed leadership is a form of collective agency (Gronn 2002, Harris 2004). Data findings alluded to the formation of collective agency or collaborative practice through the development of 'teams' or 'committees' in each of the participating schools:

*"There are so many teams working at different things, it is definitely very much a shared leadership, shared teams. It's very much people collaborating together"*  
(Participant 3)

*"Within all our posts we have committees, we have a representative or two from each of the different year groups"* (Participant 1)

*"We do have a green school committee, we do have an active school committee"*  
(Participant 2)

*"Small groups work together on developing curricular areas, resources, plans etc."*  
(Questionnaire , Question 9 b)

Regular and wide spanning teams have resulted in a cultural change in some of the participating school:

*"I think when there's teams working all the time together, that it is happening more naturally, more fluidly throughout the school and I think it does create a better atmosphere within the school"* (Participant 2)

*"I suppose you could say there has been a cultural change within our school and a movement towards a more distributed, more collaborative approach"* (Participant 3)

This reflects a cultural change within the schools from individualism towards a culture of collaboration (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018). Such a culture cultivates the sharing of skills in a safe environment where teachers and pupils can learn and develop through collegial practice, highlighting a benefit of adopting the distributed leadership approach in the participating schools.

Participating teachers in the research recognised the positive impact that involvement in collaborative teams was having on the development of teacher expertise within their schools, leading to improvements in teaching and learning and enhanced creativity within the school environment:

*“Already you work with your partner [teacher of equivalent class level] through everything that you're doing, and that's fostered in our school and it's really good. There's the sharing of skills, so there's a sharing of ideas and creativity whenever it comes to, the, you know, distributed leadership, because you need other people to improve you as a teacher”*

(Participant 1)

*“There's also opportunities for people who have an interest or have an expertise in a particular area to share their, I suppose, their expertise in that area. It gives opportunities for people to go and do CPD in particular areas”*(Participant 3)

*“Participating in CPD to develop expertise in the area, that would be something that would be pretty common in our school too if you are involved in a team”* (Participant 2)

*“So yeah, there's a really positive drive[towards distributed leadership] going on in our school at the moment. And I suppose it's benefiting the teachers and the pupils, the learning for teachers and pupils”* (Participant 3)

The development of teachers, the McKinsey report (Barber *et al.* 2010) posits, makes the biggest contribution to student learning. It also harnesses the knowledge and skills dispersed throughout the school (Sugrue 2009b), and through collaborative practice, develops the expertise of fellow teachers and pupils alike. Collaborative practice as discussed by teachers during interview, was employed as a strategy to involve staff in policy making for the school. Teachers reported that this collaborative approach helps to unify the staff and drive towards a common vision for school development.

In addition to pupils benefitting from the class teacher's development, a counterintuitive finding of the research was the suggestion that pupil engagement in collaborative teams afforded the opportunity to experience the expertise of teachers they may not otherwise encounter on their journey through primary school:

*“You [the pupil] could meet them [teachers with an expertise] through the various clubs and things that take place outside of school, . . . because that teacher has shared their skills, you know, outside of their own classroom even though you're [the pupil] not in that particular class”* (Participant 1)

Participant 1 is talking about a teacher whose leadership role permits them to work with children in collaborative groups from classes beyond their own classroom walls. The teacher's expertise in a particular area e.g. science, empower this role within the school and thus strengthening the argument for leadership distribution based on expertise rather than experience (Hickey 2017).

The research outlined the key role played by the principal in facilitating the creation of the teams, making it possible for others to do good work (Kouzes and Posner 2012), through embracement of a distributed leadership approach:

*“Our principal provides supervision to classes in order to release staff for meetings, in order that they can share ideas and practices and that then leads to improving learning”* (Participant 1)

*“There could be people popping into teams for 20 minutes and then heading off to another team meeting, and it happens, very, very naturally at the moment and I think probably that is attributed very much to our actual principal. She garnishes the team, creates them and then suddenly, just lets everything flow”* (Participant 2)

The creation of effective collaborative practice in schools embodies a symbolic relationship between the top down approach to leadership and the bottom up, teacher lead leadership (King and Stevenson 2017). A bottom up leadership approach is considered underdeveloped in Ireland by King and Nihill (2019) with school principal involvement as one of their recommendations to enhance a bottom up leadership approach. Findings in this research were in contrast to the King and Nihill's (2019) research. The principals in the participating schools played an active role in facilitating the effective implementation of collegial practice, strengthening a bottom up leadership approach. A skill of effective leaders, the McKinsley

(Barber *et al.* 2010) report asserts, is their ability to distribute leadership throughout the school by establishing collaborative teams within their staff as was evident in the research.

A challenge of collaborative practice, highlighted in this research, is the organisational challenge of facilitating collaborative practice to take place.

*“I suppose. Another challenge is the organizational challenge of allowing collaboration to take place within the school community. I suppose I had first-hand experience of that, this year when my class was involved in Lesson study. . it was a collaborative teaching approach in our school. It was fantastic, it really was. The results were fantastic. The teacher, myself and four special education teachers came together and created a fantastic lesson for the children and the children really benefited from that and the teachers, they were learning too. The teacher learning that took place through the collaboration was huge, but from a management and leadership point of view, I suppose, I was really aware of the challenges that existed, in trying to coordinate sub cover at different times of the day for my class to allow teachers to collaborate and allow for this really innovative style of teaching, that was definitely beneficial for the children”, (Participant 3)*

Participant 3 highlights the value of collaborative practice, in this instance in relation to a lesson study approach to teaching which embraces collaboration. Yet, she highlights the logistical organisational struggle in trying to set it up, especially when there is a necessity to displace teachers from their classroom practice. Harris (2005) argues that time to meet is part of the infrastructure of collaborative practice, and a necessity for successful implementation of a distributed leadership approach. Through effective leadership and the implementation of a collaborative culture within the school, these challenges may be overcome. The purpose of leadership Sergiovanni (2001) purports, is to find solutions to problems that present. Providing sub cover for collaborative practice to take during the school day has been addressed in some of the participating schools by scheduling collaborative team meetings to take place after school hours *“anytime there's Crokepark, [additional 1 hour non-class contact hour] there is usually team meetings”* (Participant 2). The benefits that collaborative practice impart on the development of teacher expertise would encourage embracement of distributed leadership, given the strong empirical links between teacher development and student learning outcomes (Leithwood and Jantzi 2000; Silins and Mulford 2002).

#### 4.2.2 Dispersing Leadership

The expectations on school leaders today to meet the needs of the demands of the changing twenty first century educational landscape is significant. This ambitious leadership role requires multiple leaders for successful realisation, reflecting a move away from individual ‘leadership as position’ towards a collaborative ‘leadership as interaction’ (Harris 2011, p.16). Adapting to meet the needs of this change, the role of the Irish principal now includes the empowerment of staff to lead, a statement of the ‘Developing Leadership Capacity’ domain, in the Quality Framework for Primary Schools- Leadership Framework Overview (Appendix A), rather than leading from the front. The role of the principal under a distributed leadership approach is one of shared power and decision making, incorporating staff into the decision making and planning of the school (Harris 2011).

The research provided real life insight into the sharing of leadership that is taking place across the participating schools. Using collaborative teams as a platform, a leader is assigned to each group by the principal. In traditional leadership models, a teacher with a formal leadership role, assumes the leadership role within the designated groups, however, this is not the case in the schools of the interviewed teachers. In their schools, a distributed leadership approach was evident:

*“It’s not a case that there’s any one leader of a team, but I would find that it seems to be whoever has a keen interest in a certain area or who has an expertise in a certain area within the team, tends to lead, at that particular time”* (Participant 2)

*“There are skills that are present in our staff and these teachers are carrying out roles, but don’t have posts of responsibilities”* (Participant 1)

Within the assigned collaborative groups, leadership was assumed in terms of staff based on expertise, which Harris (2014) views as the essence of distributed leadership. Teachers who had expertise, regardless of whether or not they had a formal leadership role within the research schools stepped forward as leader within the collaborative group.

Leadership was traditionally devolved by the principal to the Leadership and Management Team (LMT) through the assignment of roles and responsibilities. As aforementioned the restructuring of this team and the explicit and implicit references made to a distributed leadership approach at policy level (Hickey 2017), have led to the necessity to share leadership

throughout the school. Through the empowerment of leaders, the principal plays an important role in nurturing leadership within the school. This is provided through the opportunities afforded to teachers to lead. The use of collaborative teams as a platform ensures the distribution of leadership through the dynamic interactions that take place and not through task delegation, a common misinterpreted view of the distributed leadership approach (Timperley 2009).

‘The LMT empower and provide opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles’ (statement 11, figure 4.5) was one of the three statements from the questionnaire that was further explored in the interview. Initial results in the questionnaire indicated that 75 per cent. of staff either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Although sharing of leadership was a strong theme throughout the data, and the data in all participating schools indicated opportunities and empowerment of staff to take on leadership roles, the remuneration of posts, time, confidence and motivation were cited as an area of tension that may possibly hinder sharing of leadership:

*“I suppose, it depends on how motivated staff are to get involved and I think you'll always have a cohort, especially when you have a large staff, you're probably going to have a certain number of people who maybe don't want to get involved, maybe they're not confident enough to get involved, maybe they're just not motivated”* (Participant 2)

*“It's got to do with time, because what has been asked, there (by taking on a role) is giving extra time in the teaching year”* (Participant 1)

*“So I suppose I felt, I think one of the main challenges is, you know, why should I do this if somebody is getting extra money for it. And I'm not. And that can cause resistance among staff, but it's definitely a challenge and something that stands in the way of a distributed leadership approach”* (Participant 3)

Correspondingly, similar challenges to empowerment of staff to lead were identified by Hickey (2017), working as a constraint to the implementation of sharing of leadership amongst staff.

Dispersing the leadership role extends beyond that of staff, and this became quite apparent in the interview discussion where pupil role relative to leadership contribution formed the third thematic area.

#### 4.2.3 Pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership

Data furnished from the questionnaire raised a question over the teachers' perception of how their school promotes the pupil voice, participation and leadership (statement 12, figure 4.5) and thus was expanded upon at interview. 33 per cent. of teachers who participated in the questionnaire, disagreed or were uncertain about this statement. Through interview the importance placed on this area, including a vast array of activities encouraging it's development in all the participating schools was enunciated in the interview data analysis:

*"We have the Student Council, which is very active within the school. We also have the active flag committee and the green schools committee. So, they would have children from a wide variety of classes involved in those committees, so they get to add their voice in that regard"* (Participant 2)

At present there is a focus at national and local level on the importance of a student council in education, advocating the role it plays in encouraging pupil participation, voice and leadership. Data from the interview suggests that teachers participating in the questionnaire may have been influenced by this focus, and in the absence of a student council in their school they did not reflect on the many other ways their school was encouraging pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership.

*"I suppose I think because the student council is very topical at the moment, it's very much something that at a national level has been advocated for, Inspectors are looking for it and I think that teachers filling in the survey would have just said, you know what, I'm not sure if we meet that [promoting the pupil voice, participation and leadership], whereas in actual fact I think we do"* (Participant 3)

Pupil voice, which MacBeath (2006) refers to as pupil participation, contribution and influence in a school context, is being nurtured within the classroom setting and at whole school level according to the data findings and is a prominent aspect of initial teacher education programmes:

*"Through my own studies at the moment I have discovered there is a huge emphasis on the pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership within classroom. . .the up and coming literature is advocating for us to do, it's a pretty new area and it's something that's new for classroom teachers. I had a teacher on teaching practice this year and*

*you know I learned a lot from her. I was probably looking for the pupil voice on a regular basis, but she put much more emphasis on it” (Participant 3)*

This indicates the development of distributed leadership approach not only at in-service, but also at pre-service level, an approach advocated for by King (2017) and Lárusdóttir and O’Connor (2017).

In Irish education, an underlying principal of the primary curriculum, is that a child should be actively involved in their own learning (DES 1999), rather than a passive learner. Riley (1998, p.126) argues that in order for active learning to take place, schools need to engage pupils in the ‘learning partnership’. She contends they have a valuable contribution to make to teacher and pupil learning and that their voices deserve to be listened to. Levin (2000, p.155) in agreement, posits that changes in education “cannot succeed and should not proceed” without meaningful input from pupils. Sharing this opinion, Crane (2001,p.54) asserts that “Schools cannot learn to become better places for learning without asking the students”. Under a distributed leadership approach, the voice of the pupil is valued and nurtured both at classroom and whole school level. This research revealed a high and shared focus at leadership and teacher level on developing the role of pupil voice, participation and leadership.

#### 4.2.4 Remuneration

A recurrent theme evident throughout all the data collated from the questionnaire and the interview was that of remuneration of middle management. Middle management posts in Ireland traditionally were referred to as ‘posts of responsibility’ and then ‘special duties teacher’ (Forde *et al.* 2019), and encompassed teachers being remunerated for taking on additional tasks outside of the classroom. The economic recession in Ireland led to an embargo on middle management posts and the subsequent restructuring of posts. This restructuring culminated in a reduction in the amount of posts larger schools were eligible to hold and a change in focus on the roles of the middle management towards leadership, rather than task distribution. This change of focus reflects the endorsement of distributed leadership approach at national level (O’Donovan 2015; Hickey 2017). Entitled to retain any posts over and above



the new allocation, some schools were left with legacy posts, which when vacated would not be filled, creating challenges for schools the research indicated:

*“In the last few years, we have lost two of our members of our leadership and management team and that's created a large void. These posts weren't replenished because they were considered to be legacy posts that was a huge blow to our school and that's a huge ask for people to volunteer and take on that workload of the post holders that we have lost”* (Participant 3)

Adapting to the new structure and as a means of addressing the gap of reduced posts, the research reveals the adoption of a distributed leadership approach in the participating schools. Taking into account the new streamlined middle management structure and given what a distributed leadership approach entails, the need for volunteerism is essential to its successful implementation in the research schools. The research revealed a considerable tension expressed by both promoted and non-promoted teachers with the need for volunteerism when a remunerated system was in place:

*“Participation builds commitment, however the flip side of this argument is that the LMT are remunerated for their roles and responsibilities and on occasion, non LMT members take on as much and more than LMT members- difficult to resolve”, “Previously, these roles would have been the responsibility of a post holder and they would get payment for the extra work”, “I can understand why it [Distributed leadership] is necessary, but I do not think this is a fair practice due to the lack of remuneration for all teachers involved”* (Questionnaire, Question 8)

Remuneration was expressed by all of the teachers interviewed as a challenge to the implementation of a distributed leadership approach:

*“We as post holders are getting remunerated for the work that we do, other members of staff, they do have the skills and are doing the work but maybe they are not being remunerated for it, and, so why should they, sometimes provide their time, which is outside of school to do any of the things I'm talking about, that are distributed leadership?”* (Participant 1)

O'Donovan (2015) in her study into the challenges facing distributed leadership in secondary schools, found volunteerism to be a key lateral strategy into the enactment of distributed leadership. Similar to the data results in this research around remuneration, discernible tensions

were expressed. The deep rooted history of volunteerism established in the research schools of O'Donovan's study, was found to impact positively on the continuity of the practice of volunteerism, with interviewee teachers expressing the action of volunteerism as "central to their identity as teachers" (O'Donovan 2015, p.257). But a question surrounds the sustainable of such an approach given the emotional conflicts experienced by the participating teachers of this study. Teacher volunteerism may have been accepted in 2015 pre-publication of the restructured leadership framework, but at primary level, in the context of the participating schools in this research, the study suggests the continuity of volunteerism is under threat.

Expanding on this theme at interview, a need of acceptance of the system by teachers was expressed by one of the teachers: "*But I suppose you also have to be accepting to the fact that it's the system too*" (Participant 2). Further challenging the remuneration debate Participant 2, outlined a need for volunteerism to provide opportunities for teachers to lead and acquire leadership skills in a safe environment in a time when accountability is low, as teachers who hold promoted posts are accountable (DES 2019):

*"You can learn from the mistakes, while at the same time, everything isn't totally compressed on you, whereas if you make a mistake at a higher level [as a formal leader], it can have a negative impact on the school"* (Participant 2)

The intention of the restructured management posts is to provide opportunities for teachers to exercise leadership (Forde *et al.* 2019), but the existence of a remunerated system, the research implies is a constraint, a barrier to motivating and empowering all staff to lead.

### 4.3 Closing thoughts

The collation of research findings, application of a theoretical model of analysis, and drawing an argument that combines an avid discussion of practice and theory was both challenging and rewarding. Data was discussed in terms of demographics, teacher awareness of leadership policy and practice and the emergent themes that were elicited from questionnaire and interview data based on the research questions. Next the concluding chapter will attempt to draw together the key outcomes of this research.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Overarching conclusions

Distributed leadership has become prominent in discourse surrounding leadership, an “inexorable movement in the education sphere” (Curtis 2017, p.206) and is now viewed as “the predominant means of conceptualising and describing leadership in education” (Hickey 2017, p.36). Capturing a teacher’s viewpoint, this small-scale study investigated leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal, through the lens of distributed leadership. Three schools with a student population of between 400-600 participated in this study. Sixty-one teachers completed an extensive questionnaire, three of which agreed to a consecutive interview to ascertain a clearer understanding of the data collected across the schools. The findings reveal that an effective leadership model (agreed by 84 per cent. of teachers), encompassing a distributed leadership approach is being enacted upon across the participating schools. Oscillating realities of the benefits and challenges involved in the adoption of a distributed leadership approach are shared by participants using a qualitative methodology informed by teacher questionnaires and interviews.

A lack of clarity around the meaning of distributed leadership was identified in the data, which is also reflected in the literature by numerous scholars (Spillane 2006; Leithwood *et al.* 2007; Harris 2013; Hickey 2017). A defining and framing of distributed leadership and supports to help with its implementation are recommended for its success in Irish schools, a sentiment shared by Timperley (2005), Youngs (2005) and King and Nihill (2019). Clarity would also enable comparison studies to take place (Hickey 2017) and overcome the lack of empirical evidence that Spillane (2005) and Harris (2013) purport as a limitation of distributed leadership. Hattie (2015) cites clarity as one of the factors for poor implementation of great policies. To address the ambiguity of definition, the researcher drew on the research of Harris and Spillane (2008), key educationalist in the field of distributed leadership, to arrive at an agreeable definition. This definition was incorporated into methodology design and read out at the beginning of each interview so that the teachers were clear on the researchers’ interpretation of the concept of distributed leadership.

A reliance of teachers on leadership to access policies and documents was revealed in the research. Although time and the academic nature of the documents were cited as the rationale

for low teacher engagement with the documents, a drive at national level to address this would mitigate against the school level tensions that Torrance and Murphy (2018, p.41) allude to in their research, when they highlight that tensions may stem from “some teachers having a greater understanding of policy intentions than their peers”. Continuous professional development for all teachers, not just members of the LMT to develop their leadership skill and policy knowledge is recommended. Lárusdóttir and O’Connor (2017) suggest that narrowing the knowledge gap between teachers and leaders encourages teachers to take on a more substantial role in leadership.

Stemming from detailed analysis of the data, four themes were identified: Development of teacher expertise through collaborative practice, Dispersing leadership, Pupil voice, participation and leadership and Renumeration; highlighting the prominent issues arising from teacher perception of leadership practice in the research schools. Teacher’s experiences of the leadership in their school was found to be predominately a very positive one, enhanced by the many beneficial characteristics the adoption of a distributed leadership approach encompasses. The establishment of collaborative groups based on expertise, was found to both enhance the learning of teachers and pupils, whilst also enhancing communication across the school which is consistent with literature (Hattie 2015; Youngs 2017; Hargraves *et al.* 2018). Such an approach is contextually sensitive and creates a system of improvement that is unique to the individual school (Russell 1996). The stakes are high when enhancement of pupil learning is impacted upon and thus, teachers would benefit from focused support to enhance and sustain the effectiveness of collaborative practice.

The theme of ‘dispersing leadership’ amongst the staff and pupils was revealed in the research as creating a democratic perspective to leadership (Youngs 2007), allowing students to become active participants in the process. Developing the interdependent capabilities of the whole school community, the research alluded to has far reaching benefits beyond pupil and teacher learning, creating a dynamic, supportive and empowering culture within the school. Meeting the needs of an egalitarian education, the involvement of the pupil voice in leadership encourages the holistic development of the child, an aim of the Irish primary curriculum (DES 1999). Continued development of the pupil voice, participation and leadership is recommended, complemented by development of teacher leadership through continued professional development and external supports.

Encouraged by the positives of a distributed leadership approach, it is important not to gloss over the tensions and struggles that the study uncovered. A dominant, recurrent limitation the research revealed was that of remuneration for leadership posts. Addressing this at government level would promote the embracement of a genuine form of distributed leadership moving away from the distribution of roles. The research suggests that there is a need for an enhanced middle leadership team given that middle leadership is seen as ‘crucial to a school’s success’ (Earley and Bubb 2004, p.162). Additional research in the area of remuneration and volunteerism in primary schools would seek to provide a better understanding of this complex issue, which is at present, the research suggests, represents a stumbling block for teachers to the continued and full embracement of distributed leadership in primary schools.

Through strong collaborative leadership practices in the participating schools, the essence of what distributed leadership encapsulates was evident. This research although small in scale, and restricted by context, through its exploration of leadership from a teachers’ perspective, furthers the knowledge of “education infrastructure (structures that support and constrain learning and teaching)” (Diamond and Spillane 2016, p.151). Adding to the limited research of distributed leadership in an Irish context, this empirical study is particularly pertinent given that at policy level distributed leadership would appear to be the concept the Department of Education and Skills envisage, describes and defines leadership practice in Ireland (Hickey 2017).

## 5.2 Recommendations for future research

Both the experience of engaging with the literature and implementing this research project have resulted in the consideration of a series of future worthy research projects which may also support policy decision making:

- Exploring an agreed definition of distributed leadership to inform coherence across national and international policy
- Further research to explore the area of remuneration and volunteerism in schools
- Carrying out the same methods explored in this master’s research on a wider scale – to illustrate a more representative national cohort and using more diverse demographic data

- Seeking out the perspectives of more stakeholder groups regarding the process of distributed leadership e.g. student, principals, parents, policy makers

Overall, additional research in this area is necessary and timely, in particular in light of such comprehensive changes in education worldwide, and future unanticipated global events that may arise.

### 5.3 Closing thoughts

The researcher has experienced a challenging yet rewarding and worthwhile engagement in the process of Masters research over the past year. The process of being immersed in scholarly research, planning methodologies in reaction to research questions, data collection and analysis and the feat of trying to draw the essence together in a concluding chapter has been a very worthy accomplishment. The true value was evident when my learning was realised in my daily practice as deputy principal and when I now reflect on the project outcomes and the theoretical insights learned in my daily working routine.

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## 7. Appendices

### Appendix A

Quality Framework for Primary Schools- Leadership Framework Overview

Source: Looking at our Schools 2016 Inspectorate document (The Inspectorate 2016, p.12)

	Domains	Standards
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	Leading learning and teaching	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching and assessment</li> <li>foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each pupil</li> <li>manage the planning and implementation of the curriculum</li> <li>foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and pupils' learning</li> </ul>
	Managing the organisation	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication</li> <li>manage the school's human, physical and financial resources so as to create and maintain a learning organisation</li> <li>manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice</li> <li>develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability</li> </ul>
	Leading school development	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation</li> <li>lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation</li> <li>build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community</li> <li>manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education</li> </ul>
	Developing leadership capacity	<p>School leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership</li> <li>empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles</li> <li>promote and facilitate the development of pupil voice, pupil participation, and pupil leadership</li> <li>build professional networks with other school leaders</li> </ul>

## Appendix B

Dear Principal,

I am writing to ask your permission to conduct research in XXXXX School, Co. Donegal. This research is being conducted as part of a Masters of Arts in Learning in Teaching. The study has been approved by Letterkenny Institute of Technology - Ethics Committee and, as part of that approval process, I am required to obtain gatekeeper permission from any research sites where participants are located. The aim of this study is to research Leadership practice in a primary school from a teachers perspective. (further information can be found in the attached Participant Information Sheet).

The project consists of a two stage process. Stage one is a data gathering questionnaire. With your permission, it would be distributed to any interested teacher. During Stage Two, I will invite teachers who have indicated an interest on their consent form to participate in an interview. This will involving conducting a 30 minute semi-structured interview.

If you are willing to be involved would you please sign the form below that acknowledges that you have read the Participant Information Sheet, you understand the nature of the study being conducted and the risks and likely benefits of participation in this study, that any data gathered is solely for research purposes and cannot be used to the benefit or detriment of any participant and you give permission for the research to be conducted in XXXX School.

Yours sincerely,

Rosemary Daly

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

Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Having been fully informed of the nature of the research to be conducted in XXXX School I give my permission for the study to be conducted. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

## Appendix C

# Questionnaire

**Please note:** The Leadership and Management Team (**LMT**) refers to the Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal I and Assistant Principal II (Formally A and B) post holders.

Please (✓) in the spaces provided:

### Q1.

	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	Over 20
How many years have you been teaching?					
For how long have you taught in this school?					

### Q2. Are you familiar with the following documents?

	I have never heard of it	I know it by title only	I have partly read it	I am fully aware of the contents
'Leadership and Management in Primary Schools' Circular Letter 0070/2018				
'Looking at our School 2016 - A quality framework for primary schools				

### Q3. Are you aware of the duties and responsibilities of your Leadership and Management Team (LMT)?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ In part \_\_\_\_\_

### Q4. Are you given an opportunity to provide an input into the responsibilities assigned to the LMT?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ No, but I would like to \_\_\_\_\_

Please elaborate here



The following questions, investigate the key leadership and management areas as outlined in the LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOLS 2016- a Quality Framework document

**Q5. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements below by ticking the appropriate box. Elaborate any key thoughts in the text box below each area.**

### Managing the Organisation

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Uncertain	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
The LMT takes responsibility for the management of the school					
The LMT establishes a safe, secure and healthy environment					
Please elaborate if you wish					

### Teaching and Learning

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Uncertain	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
The LMT promotes a culture of improvement in teaching and learning in your school					
The LMT has contributed to a culture of collaboration in your school					
Creativity and innovation in teaching and learning is developed through the work of the LMT					
Inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of the child is fostered by the LMT					
Please elaborate if you wish					

## Leading School Development

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Uncertain	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
The LMT manage, lead and mediate change (Changes in education and needs of the school)					
The LMT communicate and lead the guiding vision of the school					
The LMT lead the school's engagement in a continuous school self- evaluation progress					
The roles of the LMT match the needs of the school					
Please elaborate if you wish					

## Developing Leadership Capacity

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Uncertain	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
The LMT empower and provide opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles					
The LMT promotes the pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership					
Please elaborate if you wish					

**Q6. What do you think is the purpose of the LMT?**

**Please comment below:**

**Q7. Are roles and responsibilities distributed to none LMT members?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Q8. Do you think they should be distributed? Discuss**

**Q9. Are you aware of the distributed leadership concept?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ In part \_\_\_\_\_

What is your understanding of it?

**Q9. Have you any suggestions that would enhance Leadership Practice in your school?**

**Q10. Are you a member of the Leadership and Management Team (LMT)?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ If **No**, You have now completed the questionnaire. **THANK YOU**

If **Yes**, Please answer questions below: **(Leadership and Management Team members only)**

(a).

	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	Over 20
How many years have you been a member of the LMT?					

(b).

	Weekly	Monthly	Termly	Yearly	Less frequently
How often does the LMT meet?					

(c). Are you aware of your assigned responsibilities? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ In part \_\_\_\_\_

(d). Have you undertaken any professional development that would aid your responsibilities in:

	Please give details:
Curricular area	
Leadership	
Other	

(e). Would you like opportunities to undertake professional development in the area of leadership?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.**

If you are willing to participate in an interview which would further explore areas outlined in this questionnaire, please forward your name to the principal.

## Appendix D

### Participant Information Sheet - Questionnaire

**Title:** A teachers' perspective of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal

**Name of Researcher:** Rosemary Daly

I would like to invite you to take part in my research. Joining the study is entirely up to you, in fact, even if you consent now, but change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation until the data are analysed and about to be written up. Before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being carried out and what it involves for you.

#### **Description and Rationale for the study**

Effective school leadership and its impact on the enhancement of student's learning outcomes has been acknowledged by many researchers in recent years. (Fullan 2006) In Ireland, there has been a major shift in educational policy with regard to in-school leadership and management. In 2017, the Department of Education and Skills published the primary circular 'Leadership and Management in Primary Schools' (DES 2017). This circular works to define and assign the roles and responsibilities of leaders in our schools. This circular also makes explicit and implicit references to distributed leadership.

Many studies into leadership practice in primary schools have taken place prior to the introduction of circular 0063/2017. The primary focus of this study will be the exploration of leadership practice under the lens of distributed leadership from the viewpoint of teachers. This is a scoping study that will examine leadership practice in co-educational primary schools in County Donegal with a student population of between 400-600. Six primary schools fall into this category including the school I teach in. Three schools will participate in the study.

The overarching research question this study seeks to explore is:

What are teachers' perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal?

The sub-questions to frame and narrow the boundaries of the study are detailed below.

From a teachers' perspective:

- What characteristics of a distributed leadership style have been adopted within the school?

- What challenges do teachers face when a school embraces a concept of distributed leadership?
- What benefits have teachers experienced when distributed leadership is utilised in their school and can they envisage any further potentials of such a concept?

### **Why have you been chosen?**

You have been chosen as you are a teacher in one of the schools that has been selected to take part in the research.

### **What will happen, and what are you required to do?**

I am asking you to participate in a survey which investigates leadership practice in your school. It examines leadership under the framework for leadership and management in Irish schools as set out in LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOLS 2016 – a Quality Framework. These key areas are: Leading Teaching and Learning, Managing the Organisation, Leading School Development and Developing Leadership Capacity.

A member of your staff will distribute and collect the questionnaires and consent sheets. The questionnaires are anonymous, so please do not identify yourself on these sheets. Each school will be supplied with two boxes, one for questionnaire collection and the other for the collection of consent forms. Identical sealed boxes will be provided to all participating schools to prevent individual schools from being identifiable. These strategies are put in place to ensure your anonymity.

### **Benefits of the study**

This study will add to the body of knowledge/research in the area of distributed leadership in particular in the Irish Primary school context. Recommendations from this study may also be of benefit to improving leadership practice in your school.

### **Risks of the study**

I cannot foresee any situation where risk or discomfort will be experienced by the participants. Participation in the research is voluntary and anonymised.

### **Confidentiality**

All data generated in hardcopy will be securely locked in a cabinet and no names or identities will be used. Softcopy data will be stored on a password protected computer which is used exclusively by the researcher, and all individual documents will be password protected and encrypted. The data will be kept securely for 5 years after the completion of the project by my supervisor at St. Angela's College, Sligo (NUI Galway)

when the softcopy will be deleted. In relation to the questionnaire, any hardcopy will be shredded after analysis. The questionnaire is anonymous and completed questionnaires will not be returned directly to the researcher but to a gatekeeper in each school. The researcher will receive the questionnaires in a sealed box, of which is identical to all participating schools. All boxes will be opened at the same time. However, I must point out that this is a small-scale study. As this research is not comparing the leadership practice of the participating schools, information gathered from each school will form a collective body of data. This will further anonymise participating schools.

### **Use of data and dissemination of results**

The results of the survey will be used for my Masters' dissertation: all references to it will be on anonymous basis. A copy of the research will be available in the LYIT library. I may also write conference papers or seek publication of my research in academic or professional education journals.

This project has been submitted to the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, School of Business Ethics Committee and has been approved in order to request surveys from a number of teachers in participating primary school in County Donegal.

### **Interest in further research/Interview**

The second stage of this research involves a short interview. The data collected from this questionnaire will be analysed. From this, areas of interest that would benefit from further, richer investigation will be identified. These areas will form the basis of the questions for a semi-structured interview. If you are interested in participating in an interview, please forward your name to your principal.

### **Timeframe for gathering data:**

Data for this research will be gathered between January and March 2020.

### **References:**

- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2017) *Circular 63/2017 Leadership and Management in Primary Schools* [online], available: [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/cl0063\\_2017.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/cl0063_2017.pdf) [accessed 30 July 2019].
- Fullan, M. (2006) *Quality Leadership, Quality Learning Proof beyond Reasonable Doubt* [online], IPPN, available: [https://www.ippn.ie/index.php?option=com\\_mtree&task=att\\_download&link\\_id=6&cf\\_id=24](https://www.ippn.ie/index.php?option=com_mtree&task=att_download&link_id=6&cf_id=24) [accessed 6 Feb 2019].

## Appendix E

### Research Participant Consent Form- Questionnaire

**Title of Project:** A teachers' perspective of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal

**Name of Chief Investigator:** Rosemary Daly

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

- ▶ I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised.
- ▶ I understand that I am being asked to participate in a questionnaire in a hardcopy format
- ▶ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way.
- ▶ I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data on me.
- ▶ If I withdraw from the study, there will be no negative consequences
- ▶ I am aware that I am permitted to view all research and transcripts that have taken place concerning my involvement. I can request a copy of the report from the researcher
- ▶ All information will be confidential and used only for the purposes of the research study
- ▶ I understand that ID codes will be used to protect my anonymity and confidentiality and names of people and places will be changed
- ▶ I agree that quotations may be used for the research.

I agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

**Signature of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix F

### Interview schedule

The interview questions for this study have been informed by the results of the questionnaire in order to illuminate and further explore the findings. The interview questions relate back to the aim and objectives of the study. In the introduction of the interview, a background to the research will be provided, along with a brief overview of the research process to date.

To provide clarity of the distributed leadership approach, the following description which encompasses the literature's understanding of distributed leadership will be given:

**Distributed leadership is about leadership practice. It recognises the need for multiple leaders that share activities. It is not about delegation. There is a focus on the interactions that take place rather than the individual actions of these leaders. The work of all individuals who contribute is acknowledged. Collaboration and sharing of expertise are key elements. Empowerment of individuals and the creation of new leaders are also defining features.**

(Harris and Spillane 2008)

Aims of the research	Indicative Interview questions related to aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To examine teacher' perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you describe the leadership practice in your school?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To determine the extent to which a distributed perspective of leadership is adopted in these schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you outline the process by which roles and responsibilities are distributed among staff members in your school?</li> </ul> <p>Part of the survey that you completed for me examined <b>12 leadership statements of practice</b> that were listed in the LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOL 2016 document. 90% of the teachers surveyed (Donegal teachers) strongly agreed with all of the statements except for <b>three</b>. Approx. one-third were uncertain or disagreed with three of them. It still means that two-thirds agreed with the statements... but I wanted to get a sense from you about your thoughts on these 3 statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approx. one-third of teachers were either uncertain or disagreed that the role and responsibilities of the LMT match the needs of the school. What are your thoughts on this?</li> <li>Approx. one-third of teachers were either uncertain or disagreed that the LMT promotes the pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership. How is the pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership promoted in your school?</li> <li>One-quarter of teachers were either uncertain or disagreed with the statement that the LMT empowers and provides opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles. What challenges do you feel a LMT face when trying to empower staff and provide the afore mentioned opportunities?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify the challenges of embracing the concept of distributed leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could you outline the challenges of adopting a distributed leadership approach?</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ascertain the benefits and potential of a distributed leadership approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What aspects of distributed leadership do you think could be beneficial for your school?</li> </ul> <p><u>Policy and Procedures:</u></p> <p>Results from the survey indicated that two-thirds of teachers had never heard of, or were aware by title only of the prominent leadership and management documents – one is the Leadership and Management in Primary Schools circular and the other is the LOOKING AT OUR SCHOOLS 2016, document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What approach could leadership take to bring about awareness among staff of governmental policies and guidelines?</li> <li>• Do you wish to add anything further or ask any questions?</li> </ul>
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The interview will be approximately 30 minutes long, and will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner.

### **Confidentiality**

All data generated in hardcopy will be securely locked in a cabinet and no names or identities will be used. Softcopy data will be stored on a password protected computer which is used exclusively by the researcher, and all individual documents will be password protected and encrypted. The data will be kept securely for 5 years after the completion of the project by my supervisor at St. Angela's College, Sligo (NUI Galway) when the softcopy will be deleted. Any hardcopy will be shredded. In relation to the interview, it will be anonymised and transcribed. When the transcription is complete, the video recording of the interview will be deleted and an interview transcript will be sent to the participants. Participants will be informed that they can request deletions or amendments to the transcripts. Also, since there are very few participants, it will be pointed out that this is a very small scale study and though anonymity will be used, the small numbers involved can limit the level of confidentiality that can be assured.

## **Appendix G**

### **Participant Information Sheet - Interview**

**Title:** A teachers' perspective of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal

**Name of Researcher:** Rosemary Daly

#### **Description and Rationale for the study**

Effective school leadership and its impact on the enhancement of student's learning outcomes has been acknowledged by many researchers in recent years. (Fullan 2006) In Ireland, there has been a major shift in educational policy with regard to in-school leadership and management. In 2017, the Department of Education and Skills published the primary circular 'Leadership and Management in Primary Schools' (DES 2017) This circular works to define and assign the roles and responsibilities of leaders in our schools. This circular also makes explicit and implicit references to distributed leadership.

Many studies into leadership practice in primary schools have taken place prior to the introduction of circular 0063/2017. The primary focus of this study will be the exploration of leadership practice under the lens of distributed leadership from the viewpoint of teachers. This is a scoping study that will examine leadership practice in co-educational primary schools in County Donegal with a student population of between 400-600. Six primary schools fall into this category including the school I teach in. Three schools will participate in the study. The overarching research question this study seeks to explore is:

What are teachers' perceptions of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal?

The sub-questions to frame and narrow the boundaries of the study are detailed below.

From a teachers' perspective:

- What characteristics of a distributed leadership style have been adopted within the school?
- What challenges do teachers face when a school embraces a concept of distributed leadership?
- What benefits have teachers experienced when distributed leadership is utilised in their school and can they envisage any further potentials of such a concept?

#### **Why have you been chosen?**

You have been chosen as you have voluntarily come forward to participate in further research.

### **What will happen, and what are you required to do?**

Firstly, your participation is entirely voluntary. In fact, even if you consent now, but change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation until the data are analysed and about to be written up.

Interviews will take place at a mutually agreed time following a semi-structured interview format. The questions of the interview will be based around themes that arise from analyses of the questionnaire. The themes/suggested questions will be sent to the participants prior to interview via email. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes long, and will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. Due to the governmental restrictions that have been introduced nationwide to deal with the Covid 19 pandemic, the interviews will take place remotely through the use of ZOOM video conferencing platform. With your consent, I will record the interview. The video recording will be deleted after transcription is complete. Remember, you have the right to cease participation at any time up until data analysis and without the need to provide a reason.

### **Benefits of the study**

This study will add to the body of knowledge/research in the area of distributed leadership in particular in the Irish Primary school context. Recommendations from this study may also be of benefit to improving leadership practice in your school.

### **Risks of the study**

I cannot foresee any situation where risk or discomfort will be experienced by the participants. Participation in the research is voluntary and anonymised.

### **Confidentiality**

All data generated in hardcopy will be securely locked in a cabinet and no names or identities will be used. Softcopy data will be stored on a password protected computer which is used exclusively by the researcher, and all individual documents will be password protected and encrypted. The data will be kept securely for 5 years after the completion of the project by my supervisor at St. Angela's College, Sligo (NUI Galway) when the softcopy will be deleted. Any hardcopy will be shredded. In relation to the interview, it will be anonymised and transcribed, and an interview transcript will be sent to you. This is to make sure that you are comfortable with its content before the researcher proceeds to use it for the purpose of the overall project. You can request deletions or amendments to the transcripts. However, since there are very few participants, I must point out that this is a very small scale study. Though anonymity will be used, the small numbers involved can limit the level of confidentiality that can be assured. As this research is not comparing the

leadership practice of the participating schools, information gathered from each school will form a collective body of data. This will further anonymise participating schools.

### **Use of data and dissemination of results**

The content of the interview will be used for my Masters' dissertation: all references to it will be on anonymous basis. A copy of the research will be available in the LYIT library. I may also write conference papers or seek publication of my research in academic or professional education journals.

This project has been submitted to the Letterkenny Institute of Technology, School of Business Ethics Committee and has been approved in order to request surveys from a number of teachers in participating primary school in County Donegal.

### **Timeframe for gathering data:**

This interview will take place in May 2020 after the analyses of the data from the questionnaire.

### **References:**

- Department of Education and Skills (DES) (2017) *Circular 63/2017 Leadership and Management in Primary Schools* [online], available: [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/cl0063\\_2017.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Archived-Circulars/cl0063_2017.pdf) [accessed 30 July 2019].
- Fullan, M. (2006) *Quality Leadership, Quality Learning Proof beyond Reasonable Doubt* [online], IPPN, available: [https://www.ippn.ie/index.php?option=com\\_mtree&task=att\\_download&link\\_id=6&cf\\_id=24](https://www.ippn.ie/index.php?option=com_mtree&task=att_download&link_id=6&cf_id=24) [accessed 6 Feb 2019]

## Appendix H

### Research Participant Consent Form- Interview

**Title of Project:** A teachers' perspective of leadership practice in large co-educational primary schools in County Donegal

**Name of Chief Investigator:** Rosemary Daly

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

- ▶ I confirm that I have been given and have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have asked and received answers to any questions raised.
- ▶ I understand that I will participate in a 30 minute semi-structured interview which will be video recorded using a video conferencing platform.
- ▶ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without my rights being affected in any way.
- ▶ I understand that the researchers will hold all information and data collected securely and in confidence and that all efforts will be made to ensure that I cannot be identified as a participant in the study (except as might be required by law) and I give permission for the researchers to hold relevant personal data on me.
- ▶ If I withdraw from the study, there will be no negative consequences
- ▶ I am aware that should I at any time I feel uncomfortable with being recorded, I can request that the recording equipment be turned off.
- ▶ I am aware that I am permitted to view all research and transcripts that have taken place concerning my involvement. I can request a copy of the report from the researcher
- ▶ All information will be confidential and used only for the purposes of the research study
- ▶ I understand that ID codes will be used to protect my anonymity and confidentiality and names of people and places will be changed
- ▶ I agree that quotations may be used for the research.

I agree to take part in the above study and consent to my data being used for the purpose of this research study as outlined in the information sheet.

**Signature of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix I- Data Analysis using Microsoft Excel, Bree and Gallagher's (2016) Framework

Screenshot of worksheet 1 of Microsoft Excel document: Raw Coded Data of Interview Question 1

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Excel interface. The title bar shows 'Coding into Themes Q 1'. The ribbon is set to 'Home', with options for Paste, Font (Calibri, size 12), Paragraph, Styles, Conditional Formatting, Insert, Delete, and Format. The worksheet grid shows columns A through W and rows 1 through 40. Column A contains the following text:

- 1 Question 1- How would you describe leadership Practice in your school?
- 2 Strong Leadership
- 3 High expectations set by principal
- 4 Principal listens to her staff
- 5 Regular meetings
- 6 Involvement of principal in allowing for meetings – therefore not delegating jobs-as she is supervising to allow it happen
- 7 Reflective practice used by leadership at meetings (School level)
- 8 Involvement of all staff in creation of policies
- 9 Regular updating of policies
- 10 Variety of activities available to children to accommodate their interests
- 11 Evolving leadership practice
- 12 Lots of recent change of personnel
- 13 More communication- major impact on the school
- 14 Moving towards a distributed leadership approach
- 15 Enhanced communication- more clarity
- 16 Staff are more comfortable
- 17 More cultural change,
- 18 Move towards a more DL, collaborative approach
- 19 Positive drive as result of DL
- 20 Benefiting the learning of teachers and pupils
- 21 Lots of teamwork
- 22 Teachers working on teams
- 23 Different people leading at different times
- 24 People with interest or expertise in an area tends to lead
- 25 Shared leadership
- 26 Shared teams
- 27 People collaborate together
- 28 Many teams working together- Very fluid leadership approach
- 29 Team meeting during Crokepark hour
- 30 Team meetings are very natural
- 31 Teachers could be members of many teams
- 32 Great Energy
- 33 Principal creates the teams, gamifies them and just lets it flow
- 34 Both LMT and Non LMT members lead teams- depending on importance
- 35 Opportunities for all staff to lead
- 36 Cultural change within the school due to the embracement of a distributed leadership approach
- 37 Opportunity to share your expertise
- 38 Willingness for staff to be involved in teams
- 39 Some staff members not intrinsically motivated to get involved within the school
- 40 Over the last few years, people have poked their head above the parapet and got involved
- 41 Culture of helping out

Cell G22 is highlighted with a green border. The taskbar at the bottom shows several tabs: 'Raw Coded Data' (active), 'Colour Coded Data', 'Themed Data', 'Compare Data for duplicates', 'Final Data- Review 1', 'Final Data- Review 2', and 'Data Overview and Key Points'.



Screenshot of worksheet 2 of Microsoft Excel document: Colour coded data

Question 1- How would you describe leadership Practice in your school?	Category
Strong Leadership	Progressive leadership
High expectations set by principal	Progressive leadership
Principal listens to her staff	Good Communication
Regular meetings	Good Communication
Involvement of principal in allowing for meetings – therefore not delegating jobs-as she is supervising to allow it happen	Collaborative
Reflective practice used by leadership at meetings (School level)	Collaborative
Involvement of all staff in creation of policies	Change
Regular updating of policies	Change
Variety of activities available to children to accommodate their interests	Positive environment
Evolving leadership practice	Positive environment
Lots of recent change of personnel	Shared leadership
More communication- major impact on the school	Shared leadership
Moving towards a distributed leadership approach	Share your expertise
Enhanced communication- more clarity	Share your expertise
Staff are more comfortable	Share your expertise
More cultural change,	Share your expertise
Move towards a more DL, collaborative approach	Share your expertise
Positive drive as result of DL	Share your expertise
Benefiting the learning of teachers and pupils	Share your expertise
Lots of teamwork	Share your expertise
Teachers working on teams	Share your expertise
Different people leading at different times	Share your expertise
People with interest or expertise in an area tends to lead	Share your expertise
Shared leadership	Share your expertise
Shared teams	Share your expertise
People collaborate together	Share your expertise
Many teams working together- Very fluid leadership approach	Share your expertise
Team meeting during Crokepark hour	Share your expertise
Team meetings are very natural	Share your expertise
Teachers could be members of many teams	Share your expertise
Great Energy	Share your expertise
Principal creates the teams, gamifies them and just lets it flow	Share your expertise
Both LMT and Non LMT members lead teams- depending on importance	Share your expertise
Opportunities for all staff to lead	Share your expertise
Cultural change within the school due to the embracement of a distributed leadership approach	Share your expertise
Opportunity to share your expertise	Share your expertise
Willingness for staff to be involved in teams	Share your expertise
Some staff members not intrinsically motivated to get involved within the school	Share your expertise
Over the last few years, people have poked their head above the parapet and got involved	Share your expertise

Screenshot of worksheet 3 of Microsoft Excel document: Themed Data

The screenshot shows the Microsoft Excel interface with the 'Home' tab selected. The ribbon includes options for Paste, Font (Calibri, size 12), Paragraph, Styles, Conditional Formatting, Insert, Delete, and Format. The worksheet title is 'F21'. The data is organized into columns B through M. Column B contains a list of leadership practices, and column C contains their corresponding themes. The themes are color-coded: blue for 'Collaborative', green for 'Positive environment', yellow for 'Change', light green for 'Good Communication', orange for 'Progressive leadership', and red for 'Shared leadership'. A small table at the bottom of the worksheet provides a navigation menu for different data views.

Row	Leadership Practice	Theme
1	Question 1- How would you describe leadership Practice in your school?	
3	Theme	
4	Regular meetings	
5	Involvement of principal in allowing for meetings – therefore not delegating jobs-as she is supervising to allow it happen	Collaborative
6	Involvement of all staff in creation of policies	
7	Move towards a more DL, collaborative approach	
8	Lots of teamwork	
9	Teachers working on teams	
10	Shared teams	
11	People collaborate together	
12	Many teams working together- Very fluid leadership approach	
13	Team meeting during Crokepark hour	
14	Team meetings are very natural	
15	Teachers could be members of many teams	
16	Principal creates the teams, gamishes them and just lets it flow	
17	Both LMT and Non LMT members lead teams- depending on importance	
18	Willingness for staff to be involved in teams	
19	Staff are more comfortable	
20	Positive drive as result of DL	Positive environment
21	Benefiting the learning of teachers and pupils	
22	Great Energy	
23	Over the last few years, people have poked their head above the parapet and got involved	
24	Culture of helping out	
25	Evolving leadership practice	
26	Lots of recent change of personnel	Change
27	More cultural change,	
28	Cultural change within the school due to the embracement of a distributed leadership approach	
29	Some staff members not intrinsically motivated to get involved within the school	
30	Principal listens to her staff	
31	More communication- major impact on the school	Good Communication
32	Enhanced communication- more clarity	
33	Strong Leadership	
34	High expectations set by principal	Progressive leadership
35	Reflective practice used by leadership at meetings (School level)	
36	Regular updating of policies	
37	Variety of activities available to children to accommodate their interests	
38	Moving towards a distributed leadership approach	
39	Different people leading at different times	
40	People with interest or expertise in an area tends to lead	Shared leadership
41	Shared leadership	

Navigation Menu at the bottom of the worksheet:

- Raw Coded Data
- Colour Coded Data
- Themed Data**
- Compare Data for duplicates
- Final Data- Review 1
- Final Data- Review 2
- Data Overview and Key Points

Screenshot of worksheet 4 of Microsoft Excel document: Compare data for duplicates

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Excel interface with the following details:

- Ribbon:** Home, Insert, Draw, Page Layout, Formulas, Data, Review, View, Tell me. The Home ribbon is active, showing options for font (Calibri, size 12), paragraph, and styles.
- Worksheet:** Columns B through N, rows 1 through 39. The title in cell B1 is "Question 1- How would you describe leadership Practice in your school?".
- Data:**

Row	Leadership Practice	Category
4	Regular meetings during Crokepark or afterschool	
5	Involvement of principal in allowing for meetings – therefore not delegating jobs-as she is supervising to allow it happen	Collaboration
6	Principal creates the teams, garnishes them and just lets it flow	
7	Involvement of all staff in creation of policies	
8	Move towards a more DL, collaborative approach	
9	Lots of teamwork, any teacher could be members of teams; both LMT and non LMT members lead teams, depending on importance	
10	Shared teams	
11	People collaborate together; Many teams working together- Very fluid/ natural leadership approach	
12	Team meetings are very natural	
13	Teachers could be members of many teams	
14	Willingness for staff to be involved in teams	
15	Staff are more comfortable	
16	Positive drive as result of DL	Positive environment
17	Benefiting the learning of teachers and pupils	
18	Great Energy	
19	Over the last few years, people have poked their head above the parapet and got involved	
20	Willingness for staff to be involved in teams	
21	Culture of helping out	
22	Evolving leadership practice	Change
23	Lots of recent change of personnel	
24	Cultural change within the school due to the embracement of a distributed leadership approach	
25	Some staff members not intrinsically motivated to get involved within the school	
26	Principal listens to her staff	Good Communication
27	More / Enhanced communication- major impact on the school; more clarity	
28	Strong Leadership	Progressive leadership
29	High expectations set by principal	
30	Reflective practice used by leadership at meetings (School level)	
31	Regular updating of policies	
32	Variety of activities available to children to accommodate their interests	
33	Moving towards a distributed leadership approach	
34	Different people leading at different times	Shared leadership
35	People with interest or expertise in an area tends to lead	
36	Shared leadership, Shared teams	
37	Opportunities for all staff to lead	
38	Opportunity to share your expertise	Share your expertise
39	Open door for people to show off their expertise and get involved and help out	
- Taskbar:** Shows several tabs: Raw Coded Data, Colour Coded Data, Themed Data, Compare Data for duplicates (active), Final Data- Review 1, Final Data- Review 2, and Data Overview and Key Points.

# Screenshot of Final Data Review 1

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Excel interface with the following elements:

- Ribbon:** Home, Insert, Draw, Page Layout, Formulas, Data, Review, View, Tell me. The Home ribbon is active, showing options for font (Calibri, size 12), bold, italic, underline, and text color. The Data ribbon shows options for Conditional Formatting, Format as Table, and Cell Styles.
- Formula Bar:** Shows the active cell address D31 and a formula icon.
- Worksheet Grid:** Columns A through N and rows 1 through 39.
  - Row 2: **Themes: Collaboration & Teacher expertise combined**
  - Rows 4-24 (Blue highlights):
    - Regular meetings during Crokepark or afterschool
    - Involvement of principal in allowing for meetings – therefore not delegating jobs-as she is supervising to allow it happen
    - Principal creates the teams, gamishes them and just lets it flow
    - Involvement of all staff in creation of policies
    - Move towards a more DL, collaborative approach
    - Lots of teamwork, any teacher could be members of teams; both LMT and non LMT members lead teams, depending on importance
    - Shared teams
    - People collaborate together; Many teams working together- Very fluid/ natural leadership approach
    - Team meetings are very natural
    - Teachers could be members of many teams
    - Willingness for staff to be involved in teams
    - Staff are asked for input.
    - Distributed leadership is being met through the creation of committees that meet regularly
    - Coordinators are paid post holders and the committee members are volunteers
    - Organisational challenge of allowing collaboration to take place
    - Collaboration between class teachers to bounce ideas off each other
    - Having various committees means that as a teachers outside of my own area, I can hear what's going on through the school
    - Bigger schools have the opportunity to bring teams together
    - Opportunities to collaborate
    - Staff involved in process- assigning of roles
    - Staff are asked for input.
  - Rows 26-38 (Yellow highlights):
    - Opportunity to share your expertise
    - Open door for people to show off their expertise and get involved and help out
    - Principal recognises or is aware of your expertise and asks you to volunteer/ approached by principal
    - Expertise from staff sought for other areas after that
    - Knowledge of skills obtained from interview by principal, then principal approaches staff member or asks for volunteers
    - Utilising the expertise of staff
    - Volunteering and recognition of skills by principal which leads to teacher being asked to undertake a role
    - Sharing and development of skills and expertise of teachers
    - Sharing of ideas and creativity
    - The establishment of various committees throughout a school enables children to access and benefit from teachers with a particular skills, without having to be taught by them
    - It gives people an opportunity to work with people who have similar interests
    - Encourages teachers to ask for help-A shared learning environment
    - Recognition of skills by principal leads to teacher being asked to undertake a role
- Taskbar:** Shows four open windows: 'Final Data Review 1' (active), 'Final Data Review 2', 'Final Data Review 3', and 'Data Overview and Key Points'.

## Screenshot of Final Data Review 2

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Excel interface. The ribbon is set to 'Home', showing options for font (Calibri, size 12), bold, italic, underline, and text color. The 'Data' tab is also visible. The worksheet contains a table with 33 rows and 8 columns. The first column (A) contains row numbers. The second column (B) contains the following text:

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1							
2	<b>Theme: Teacher expertise development through collaborative practice</b>						
3							
4	Regular meetings organised by leadership						
5	Leading by example, principal involvement						
6	Principal creates the teams, garnishes them and just lets it flow						
7	Staff expertise utilised to further develop the school through involvement in policy making, input into areas in need of development-through assigning of roles						
8	Move towards a more DL, collaborative approach						
9	Lots of teamwork, any teacher could be members of teams; both LMT and non LMT members lead teams, depending on importance						
10	People collaborate together; Shared teams, Many teams working together- Very fluid/ natural leadership approach						
11	Distributed leadership is being met through the creation of committees/teams that meet regularly						
12	Team meetings are very natural						
13	Teachers could be members of many teams						
14	Staff motivated to be involved						
15	Coordinators are paid post holders and the committee members are volunteers						
16	Organisational challenge of allowing collaboration to take place						
17	Development of teacher expertise through sharing of ideas						
18	Whole School communication is enhanced through collaborative meetings- essential in larger school						
19	Bigger schools have the opportunity to bring teams together						
20	Opportunity to share your expertise and become involved in whole school						
21	Principals role in recognising and cultivating expertise and assigning roles						
22	Expertise from staff sought						
23	Principal Knowledge from interview of skills & expertise						
24	Utilising the expertise of staff						
25	Sharing and development of skills and expertise of teachers through collaborative practice						
26	Sharing of ideas and creativity						
27	It gives people an opportunity to work with people who have similar interests						
28	Cultivates a sharing of skills and a safe environment where teachers and pupils can learn and develop through questioning						
29	Benefit for children of the sharing and development of teacher expertise						
30	Advantage of children engaging in collaborative, whole school activities						
31							
32							
33							

The status bar at the bottom shows the following tabs: 'Final Data Review 1' (yellow), 'Final Data Review 2' (purple), 'Final Data Review 3' (red), and 'Data Overview and Key Points' (green). The status bar also displays 'Ready' and various window management icons.

Screenshot of Final Data Review 3

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Excel interface. The ribbon at the top includes tabs for Home, Insert, Draw, Page Layout, Formulas, Data, Review, View, and Tell me. The Home tab is active, showing options for font (Calibri, size 12), bold, italic, underline, and text color. The Data tab is also visible, showing options for Conditional Formatting, Format as Table, and Cell Styles. The worksheet grid shows a table with 18 rows of text in column A. The text in the table is as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1							
2		<b>Teacher Expertise Development through Collaborative Practice</b>					
3							
4		Distributed leadership is being met through the creation of committees/teams that meet regularly-Collaboration					
5		Regular collaboration takes place through teacher participation in teams or committees, meetings organised by leadership, leading to a 'natural' occurrence: Culture of the school					
6		Teams may working together-interdependency, flexible approach Very fluid/ natural leadership approach					
7		Ability for any teacher to be members of teams; both LMT and non LMT members lead teams, depending on importance & expertise					
8		Opportunity for sharing and development of teacher expertise, allowing teachers with similar interests to work together					
9		Sharing and development of skills,expertise, ideas of teachers through collaborative practice leading to enhanced creativity within the school environment					
10		Cultivates a sharing of skills and a safe environment where teachers and pupils can learn and develop through questioning & collaborating					
11		Organisational challenge of allowing collaboration to take place exists					
12		Principal creates the teams, garnishes them and just lets it flow					
13		Principals role in regconising, cultivating & utilising expertise of staff in assigning roles; knowledge acquired through interview or sought from staff					
14		Leading by example, principal involvement					
15		Staff expertise utilised to further develop the school through involvement in policy making, imput into areas in need of development-through assigning of roles					
16		Staff motivated to be involved- Culture of school					
17		Whole School communication is enhanced through collaborative meetings- essential in larger school					
18		Larger schools have greater ability to create more teams by nature of their teacher numbers					
19							
20							
21							
22							
23							
24							
25							
26							
27							
28							

The bottom of the screenshot shows the worksheet tab bar with four tabs: 'Final Data Review 1' (yellow), 'Final Data Review 2' (purple), 'Final Data Review 3' (red), and 'Data Overview and Key Points' (green). The 'Final Data Review 3' tab is currently selected.

# Screenshot of Data Overview and Key Points

The screenshot displays the Microsoft Excel interface with the following elements:

- Home Tab:** Font settings (Calibri, size 12), Bold, Italic, Underline, Paragraph alignment, Styles (General), Conditional Formatting, Insert, Delete, Format, Sort & Filter, and Find & Select.
- Worksheet:**
  - Row 2:** **Teacher Expertise Development through Collaborative Practice**
  - Row 4:** **Data Overview** | Distributed leadership is being met through the creation of committees/teams that meet regularly-Collaboration
  - Row 5:** Regular collaboration takes place through teacher participation in teams or committees, meetings organised by leadership, leading to a 'natural' occurrence: Culture of the school
  - Row 6:** Teams may working together-interdependency, flexible approach Very fluid/ natural leadership approach
  - Row 7:** Ability for any teacher to be members of teams; both LMT and non LMT members lead teams, depending on importance & expertise
  - Row 8:** Opportunity for sharing and development of teacher expertise, allowing teachers with similar interests to work together
  - Row 9:** Sharing and development of skills,expertise, ideas of teachers through collaborative practice leading to enhanced creativity within the school environment
  - Row 10:** Cultivates a sharing of skills and a safe environment where teachers and pupils can learn and develop through questioning & collaborating
  - Row 11:** Organisational challenge of allowing collaboration to take place exists
  - Row 12:** Principal creates the teams, garnishes them and just lets it flow
  - Row 13:** Principals role in regconising, cultivating & utilising expertise of staff in assigning roles; knowledge acquired through interview or sought from staff
  - Row 14:** Leading by example, principal involvement
  - Row 15:** Staff expertise utilised to further develop the school through involvement in policy making, imput into areas in need of development-through assigning of roles
  - Row 16:** Staff motivated to be involved- Culture of school
  - Row 17:** Whole School communication is enhanced through collaborative meetings- essential in larger school
  - Row 18:** Larger schools have greater ability to create more teams by nature of their teacher numbers
  - Row 19:** **Key points:**
  - Row 20:** 1 Collaborative practice is taking place through the development of committess/teams
  - Row 21:** 2 Participation in teams develop the expertise of teachers and pupils leading to improvements in teaching and learning
  - Row 22:** 3 The Principal plays a key role in facilitaing the creation of teams, guided by teacher input
  - Row 23:** 4 Cultural change of school towards a motivated, collaborative, inclusive approach
  - Row 24:** 5 Easier to facilitate in larger schools due to teacher numbers
  - Row 25:** 6 The facilitation of multiple meetings in a school creates an organisational challenge
- Taskbar:** Final Data Review 1, Final Data Review 2, Final Data Review 3, Data Overview and Key Points

## Appendix J

### Definitions of final themes

<b>Theme: Development of teacher expertise through collaborative practice</b>
<b>Definition:</b> As emerged from the data, collaborative practice is an established part of each participating school, a key feature of a distributed leadership approach. The objective of collaborative teams at leadership level, focus primarily on school development or to enhance pupil learning. Adopting a teachers' perspective, collaborative practice, the data suggests, also develops teacher expertise through the engagement and interactions that occur between teachers and their peers in 'focus committees' or 'teams'. A focus on interactions is the essence of a truly distributed leadership approach (Harris 2013).
<b>Theme: Dispersing leadership</b>
<b>Definition:</b> The focus of this theme, is the opportunity afforded for all teachers to lead as was evident in the data. Drawing on a teachers' perspective, the data suggests that the empowerment of teachers to lead, although a challenge at times has the dual benefit of enhancing the teaching and learning of pupils and teachers.
<b>Theme: Pupil participation , pupil voice, pupil leadership</b>
<b>Definition:</b> This theme encapsulated the important of the pupil voice, pupil participation and pupil leadership at both classroom and school level. The data suggests that all elements of this topical theme, are being fulfilled incognisant to some of the teacher in the participating schools. Leadership development of pupils, is an aspect of a distributed leadership approach and the nurturing of pupil participation and pupil voice are all integral elements in this development.
<b>Theme: Remuneration</b>
<b>Definition:</b> The data exposed an underlying challenge which works to constrain the successful implementation of a distributed leadership approach. The presence of a remunerated governance structure within a school may limit the scope of a distributed leadership approach. The recent restructuring of the roles and responsibilities of promoted teachers has resulted in a change in roles and a possible reduction in posts for schools involved in this research which has had a negative impact on leadership capacity within the school.



## **Appendix K**

### List of Abbreviations

**LAOS**= Looking at Our Schools 2016 – A Quality Framework for Primary Schools

**LMT**= Leadership and Management Team