



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why

Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]

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Chapter 9



ITERATIVE BEST EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS PROGRAMME
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This report is one of a series of best evidence synthesis iterations (BESs) commissioned by the Ministry of Education. The Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme is seeking to support collaborative knowledge building and use across policy, research, and practice in education. This series of syntheses draws together bodies of research evidence to explain what works and why to improve valued education outcomes and to make a bigger difference for the education of all our children and young people. Each synthesis celebrates the work of educators and the inquiry processes that enable educators and researchers to bring about sustainable improvements in education. Each is part of an iterative process that anticipates future research and development informing educational practice.

Earlier BESs have focused on effective teaching and professional learning in schools and on the impact of family and community influences on educational outcomes. This *School Leadership and Student Outcomes BES* will prove a crucial support for school leaders as they address our shared challenge of preparing all our children for the future.

The International Academy of Education has commissioned summaries of the recent BESs developed by the Ministry of Education. While the full reports provide the explanations and vignettes that are needed to support educational change, these short summaries will also be a convenient help for leaders. They will be available on the International Academy of Education website www.iaoed.org and on the UNESCO website <http://unesdoc.unesco.org>. The first of these summaries to be published is:

Timperley, H. (2008). *Teacher professional learning and development: Educational practices series 18*. International Academy of Education, International Bureau of Education & UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0017/001791/179161e.pdf>

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While recognising that the development of a best evidence synthesis is a collaborative undertaking based on scoping and national guidelines developed by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and incorporating contributions from many others with relevant expertise, Viviane Robinson, Margie Hohepa, and Claire Lloyd assert their moral right to be recognised as the authors of this work

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Claire Lloyd

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora te iwi.
Through each of our contributions the people will thrive.

9. Contributions, implications, reflections

9.1 Contributions

We begin this final chapter of the Leadership BES by summarising what we see as its four most important contributions to school leadership.

9.1.1 This BES confirms that leadership matters

While the evidence has been sparser than we would have liked, of varying methodological quality, and difficult to integrate, our different analyses have consistently found that quality leadership makes an educationally important difference to student outcomes. This is true for both Māori-medium and English-medium schools. The meta-analyses in chapters 4 and 5 confirm the relationship between leadership and achievement: the leadership of those schools where the students achieved at or above expected levels looked quite different from the leadership of otherwise similar schools where the students consistently performed below expected levels.

Every New Zealand school needs skilled leadership so that it can meet the increasingly complex challenge of educating young people. More than ever before, young people need a quality education if they are to live satisfying and productive lives. At the same time, the students in our schools are increasingly diverse. Teachers cannot be expected to meet this double challenge unless appropriate conditions are in place—it is the job of educational leaders at all levels of the system to ensure that they are.

9.1.2 This BES defines the types of leadership that impact on student outcomes

While our finding about the overall impact of leadership is important, practitioners want to know what *types* of leadership have the most impact. This BES answers this question. In a nutshell, the closer leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely it is that they will have a positive impact on their students.

The first of our two analyses used two influential leadership theories—pedagogical (instructional) leadership and transformational leadership—to define what was meant by ‘leadership type’. It showed that the impact of pedagogical leadership is three to four times that of transformational leadership. The reason for this is that transformational leadership is focused on the relationship between leaders and followers rather than on the educational work of the school. This is not to say that relationships do not matter; indeed, every leadership dimension identified in this BES includes an important relationships component. But the quality of leader–staff relationships is not predictive of the quality of student outcomes. This is because there is more to educational leadership than building collegial teams, establishing a loyal and cohesive staff, and developing a shared and inspirational vision. Educational leadership is about focusing such relationships on specific pedagogical work. Pedagogical leadership theory more successfully captures the practices involved.

The same message emerged from our second analysis, in which we estimated the magnitude of the impact on student outcomes of five different leadership dimensions. The bigger effects were obtained for those types of leadership most closely associated with teaching and learning or with teacher professional learning that was focused on improving student outcomes (dimensions 1, 3, and 4 in Figure 30).

In addition to the five dimensions that emerged from our meta-analysis of studies that directly tested the relationship between leadership and student outcomes, a second set of dimensions was derived from indirect New Zealand evidence. This evidence concerned the role played

by leaders in interventions that had positive outcomes for students. Of the six dimensions derived in this way, three had clear equivalents in the earlier set⁴⁸⁴. The three that had no clear equivalents are dimensions 6, 7, and 8. It should be remembered that the evidence for these three dimensions is not as robust as for the first five⁴⁸⁵.

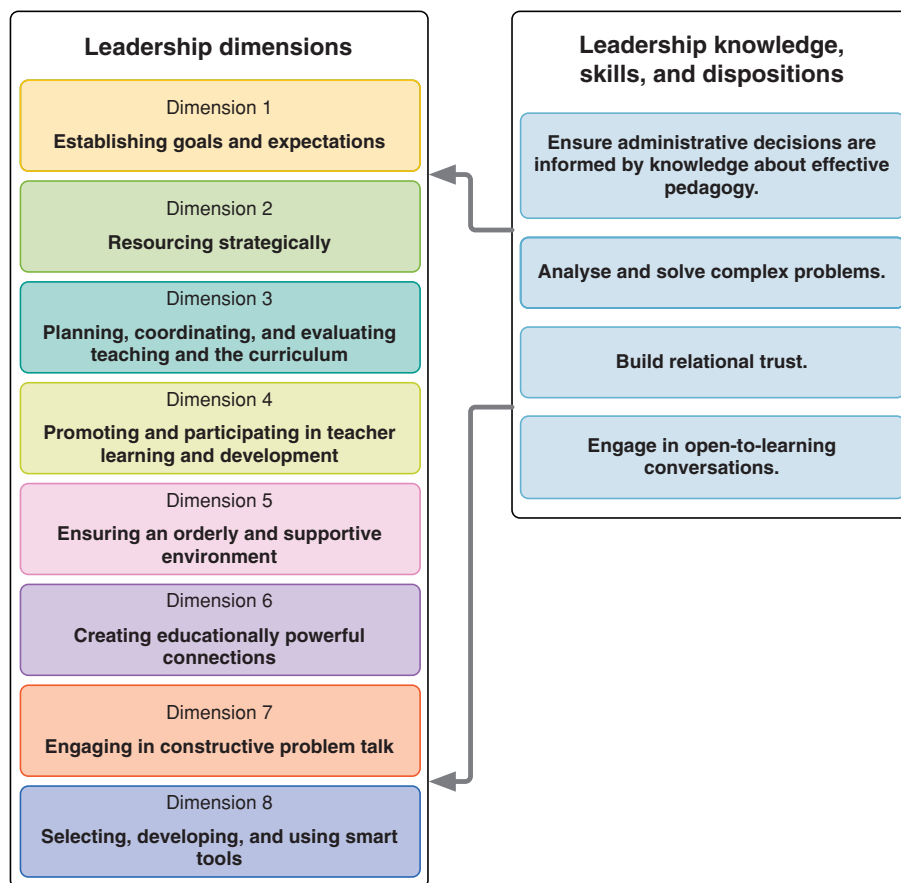


Figure 30. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions underpinning the leadership dimensions

With this caveat in mind, we turn now to a discussion of the eight dimensions included in Figure 30. What picture do they (together with the underpinning KSDs) convey of the type of leadership that makes a powerful difference to student outcomes?

First, such leadership involves *the determined pursuit of goals*—goals that are linked to wider purposes, are unambiguous, and are attractive to those who are to pursue them. Goal setting is a powerful leadership tool in the quest for improving valued student outcomes. It is through goals that leaders signal to staff that some activities and outcomes are more important than others. For Māori-medium leadership, this includes signalling that Māori culture and language learning are fundamental to the achievement of valued student outcomes. In the absence of clear goals, it is likely that multiple agendas and conflicting priorities will dissipate the efforts and initiative of staff, leading potentially to burnout, cynicism, and disengagement. Even the most goal-focused leaders, however, need to skilfully manage the continual distractions that threaten to undermine their best intentions. These include school crises, new policy initiatives,

⁴⁸⁴ Those that have equivalents in the dimensions derived from the meta-analysis are: setting educational goals, obtaining and allocating resources aligned to pedagogical goals, and creating a community that learns how to improve student success. The equivalent dimensions from the direct evidence are: establishing goals and expectations, resourcing strategically, and promoting and participating in teacher learning and development.

⁴⁸⁵ Methodologically speaking, the dimensions derived from the indirect evidence are not as firmly grounded as those derived from the direct evidence because the research from which the indirect dimensions are derived did not test the relationship between leadership practices and student outcomes. The indirect dimensions are derived from careful, qualitative analyses of the types of leadership practices reported in successful New Zealand initiatives to improve teaching and learning.

calls for goal revision or abandonment, and the maintenance of routines that are not directly goal related. A shared focus on agreed goals enables leaders and staff to recognise that they are being distracted and to deliberately decide what to do about it. Without goals, there is no distraction to recognise, and routines and crises come to dominate leaders' work⁴⁸⁶.

Note that we have deliberately emphasised goals rather than vision or mission. We have done this because the evidence is clear that unless these latter, more abstract pursuits are translated into actionable activities, they amount to little more than wordsmithing. The New Zealand interventions that have been successful in raising student achievement have been goal driven and supported by repeated cycles of data-based inquiry focused on closing the gap between what is happening now and what is wanted for the future. These goals have moved beyond the written and spoken exhortations of leaders and have been embedded in the routines of teaching and teacher learning.

New Zealand schools are currently required to set and report annually against self-determined school targets⁴⁸⁷. For this reason alone, it should be a priority to research schools' capacity to do this. A starting point would be to determine the validity of the Analyses of Variance section of the reports submitted to the Ministry of Education. This could be done by studying the relationship between what is said in the reports and the school activities and evidence to which they refer. Efforts to develop the goal-setting capability of leaders should be integrated into existing school improvement efforts (rather than taught separately) because the effective setting and pursuit of goals also requires sound curriculum and pedagogical knowledge (see Appendix 8.1).

Second, it is clarity of educational goals that makes *strategic resourcing* possible. While this leadership dimension had a small impact on student outcomes, resourcing the pursuit of goals is a condition for achieving them. In schools where students performed above expected levels, staff reported that their leaders made appropriate teaching resources available and that they were sources of advice about teaching problems. There is an obvious connection between resource selection and leaders' knowledge of curriculum, curriculum progressions, and pedagogy. Since New Zealand school leaders have considerable discretion in the selection of teaching resources, every school needs leaders who are able to make good choices. In the only available New Zealand study, school leaders had difficulty stating how the ready-made literacy packages they were using met the learning needs of the target groups. The study also found that there was a strong tendency for leaders to see additional material resources, rather than improved teaching, as the way to meet learning needs⁴⁸⁸.

Third, *planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum* lies at the heart of pedagogical leadership. In larger secondary schools, much of this leadership will normally be provided by subject specialists such as heads of department and curriculum leaders. In schools where students were performing above expected levels, leaders were more likely to be involved with their staff in curriculum planning, visiting classrooms, and reviewing evidence about student learning. Staff in such schools welcomed their leaders' involvement in teacher appraisal and classroom observation because it resulted in useful feedback. Once again, this dimension is strongly linked to all the KSDs: if leaders are knowledgeable, they are more likely to give useful feedback, and their feedback is more likely to be taken seriously if given in the context of an open-to-learning conversation.

Fourth, *Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development* is the dimension most strongly associated with positive student outcomes. Since the possible agenda for teacher professional learning is endless, goals should be used to narrow it down. By getting directly involved in teacher learning, leaders gain a deep understanding of the conditions necessary

⁴⁸⁶ For more on managing goal distractions, see Levin, B. (2009). *How to change 5000 schools: A practical approach for leading change at every level*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

⁴⁸⁷ See National Administration Guideline 2 <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=8189&indexid=8186&indexparentid=1012>

⁴⁸⁸ Parr, J., Aikman, M., Irving, E., & Glasswell, K. (2004). *An evaluation of the use and integration of readymade commercial literacy packages into classroom programmes* (Final report). Wellington: Ministry of Education.

for substantive, sustained change. It is leaders' responsibility to create those conditions. We have reviewed many New Zealand studies in which school leaders transformed existing staff, syndicate, and departmental meetings into highly effective professional learning opportunities. By changing norms and routines, these leaders were able to give regular meetings the qualities of effective professional communities. The most important of these are an intensive focus on the teaching–achievement relationship and collective responsibility for student achievement and well-being.

Fifth, by *ensuring an orderly and supportive environment*, leadership makes it possible for staff to teach and students to learn. A critical part of this consists of protecting teaching time from administrative and student disruption. Another consists of creating classroom and playground environments in which both students and staff feel respected and cared for.

Sixth, alignment and coherence are constant themes in the literature on improving teaching and learning. We have captured them in the dimension we call *creating educationally powerful connections*. We know that curricula characterised by shared and planned assessments, common themes, and guiding principles produces greater student gains than less coherent curricula. Such curricula have strong connections between units of work, year levels, and subject departments. These connections cannot be achieved if teachers work in silos. Alignment is important because it relates to how we learn important ideas: we need to be exposed to them in repeated and varied ways within a short timeframe. In-depth, cognitive engagement of this kind is not possible for students who experience a fragmented curriculum in which similar ideas are communicated using different terminology and where teachers do not have the time to identify and correct misunderstandings.

School leaders can build educationally powerful connections with families, whānau, and communities through teaching, through homework, and through school–home relationships. Leadership in making such connections and building trust is particularly important where the gap between the educational culture of the school and the culture of the home is wide. This evidence suggests to leaders how they can make real progress on our leadership challenges. Certain kinds of school–family connections can have large positive effects on the academic and social outcomes of students, especially for those who have been under-served or who are at risk. Leaders can use educationally powerful connections and the diversity of the school community to resource the work of the school.

This evidence is also important for the moral purpose that is implicit in an educational leadership role. We need a 'first do no harm' principle in education as in health. Some kinds of engagement with families and communities can be counterproductive. Schools may invest considerable time, energy, and resources in activities that have minimal or even negative impact on student outcomes and end up frustrating students, families, and staff. The evidence about homework is important for school leadership because homework can support or undermine student achievement. There is research and development that can support schools with highly effective approaches, interventions, and smart tools. Leaders can make use of these to align their support to student learning and to assist both teachers and parents to engage in reciprocal teaching–learning processes (ako).

Seventh, the dimension *engaging in constructive problem talk*, in association with the skills of open-to-learning conversations, provides an account of the leadership of change. Conflict and resistance are concomitants of change. Leaders who make their own theories of action explicit and help others to do the same can transform conflict and resistance into constructive debate. Such leaders are open-minded, committed to testing the validity of their own views, and skilled at challenging their staff to do the same. The ability of leaders to name (rather than avoid) problems and to frame them as learning opportunities is critical to continuous, evidence-based school improvement. Once problems have been opened up for discussion, skilled leaders model a thoughtful problem-solving process that questions taken-for-granted assumptions, gathers relevant evidence, and avoids a rush to judgment. The empirical evidence, illustrative examples,

and theoretical explanations presented in this section show how the process of naming, analysing, and resolving problems—far from being a negative experience—can strengthen relationships and improve teaching and learning.

Eighth, we know of no other review of the literature that includes *selecting, developing, and using smart tools* as a dimension of educational leadership. We identified it in our analysis of the indirect evidence because our conception of distributed leadership was inclusive of the tools that structure some leadership tasks. This conception reflects recent theories on distributed cognition⁴⁸⁹ and distributed leadership⁴⁹⁰, which have not yet influenced the design of leadership surveys. That is why this dimension does not feature in the dimensions derived from the direct evidence. Investment in the development of smart leadership tools is particularly important for New Zealand, where our self-managing system means that high levels of expertise are required in every school.

It should not be concluded, based on our findings, that the leaders in every school should be pouring all their energies directly into teaching and teacher development and ignoring, for example, the need to ensure an orderly and supportive environment. Schools go through stages, and different stages are likely to require different leadership priorities. In some situations, leaders may need to focus on orderliness, safety, and civility before they can give fuller attention to the curriculum and teacher professional learning. Because the direct evidence from which the eight dimensions were derived was cross-sectional in nature, our analysis did not capture changes in their relative importance over time. Nevertheless, our general conclusion from this BES and the BESs that focus on effective pedagogy⁴⁹¹ is that school leadership is likely to have the greatest positive impact on student achievement and well-being when it prioritises the quality of learning, teaching, and teacher learning in ways that attend to both academic and social outcomes.

The evidence reviewed for this BES is inclusive of both formal and informal leadership. The dimensions and KSDs in Figure 30 are broadly applicable, therefore, to principals, holders of senior and middle management positions, and teacher leaders. While the focus of people in these positions will always vary, it is important to recognise that school size will play a crucial role in determining who is responsible for what. For example, in New Zealand's smallest schools, where there is no leadership 'team', most professional leadership functions are carried out by the principal.

9.1.3 This BES offers explanations for the power of the leadership dimensions

Figure 30 lists eight leadership dimensions that are associated with positive student outcomes. However, if leaders are to use these dimensions effectively in their own contexts, they need to understand how and why they work⁴⁹². Without such explanations, our synthesis would be little more than another list of effective leadership characteristics—albeit evidence-based. A third major contribution of this BES, therefore, is the use of theory to explain how and why each dimension has the power to positively impact on student outcomes.

If the dimensions are disseminated and discussed without the accompanying explanations, the likely outcome will be either no change or counterproductive change. For example, greater emphasis on the leadership of teacher professional learning and development (Dimension 4) could be counterproductive if done without an understanding of the characteristics of effective professional development (discussed at length in the section *Creating a community that learns how to improve student success* [page 120]). Similarly, increased evaluation of teaching

⁴⁸⁹ Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

⁴⁹⁰ Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

⁴⁹¹ www.educationcounts.govt.nz/goto/BES

⁴⁹² Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best evidence synthesis iteration*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

(Dimension 3) is likely to be counterproductive if it involves using classroom observation tools that do not capture teacher responsiveness to student understanding of lesson content. We emphasise that to apply the dimensions, leaders need to understand the qualities that are responsible for their impact. They cannot gain this understanding from a stand-alone list or a series of bullet points describing the dimensions.

We have noted the extent to which our theoretical explanations have been drawn from outside the general educational leadership literature. To understand why a particular leadership dimension makes a difference to student outcomes, we have often had to draw on theory and evidence that provide greater detail about the various leadership tasks. For example, once our meta-analysis confirmed the importance of goal setting, we turned to the literature on goal setting to understand goal theory and the conditions required to make it work. Since the practice of leadership is task-embedded, leadership theory and research needs to be much more closely integrated with theory and evidence on the tasks involved in leading a particular type of group or organisation⁴⁹³.

9.1.4 This BES identifies some of the KSDs needed for effective leadership

Chapter 8 and parts of Chapter 6 come close to offering an account of the actual practices and constituent knowledge, skills, and dispositions that underpin the leadership dimensions. We say ‘come close’ because the situated nature of leadership means that it will never be possible to fully specify them.

One of the big messages of Chapter 8 is that pedagogical leadership requires deep knowledge of the core business of teaching and learning. While generic business and leadership skills may be important, if they are not integrated with the professional knowledge base of teaching, they will not advance the educational agenda of improving teaching and learning. For example, leaders cannot productively discuss with teachers their classroom practice when all they have is expertise in facilitative questioning or generic problem solving. They must understand the content of the discussion in order to be able to evaluate teachers’ answers to the questions they ask.

Boards of trustees also need educational expertise because they are increasingly being held accountable for the quality of curriculum delivery and the monitoring of student outcomes. Principals and teacher trustees can advise on such matters, but the essence of accountability is that trustees are able to make independent judgments about the accounts provided. While some small-scale research suggests that lay trustees in low-decile communities lack the expertise to do this, further research is needed to determine the extent to which trustees generally have the capacity to monitor curriculum delivery and student outcomes⁴⁹⁴.

Educational expertise is a necessary but not sufficient condition for forging the kinds of relationships that are required for sustained school improvement. Leaders who are able to build trust relationships are in a position to foster the inquiry, risk taking, and collaborative effort that school improvement demands. As discussed in Chapter 8, a precursor of trust is the perception that leadership is competent⁴⁹⁵. Teachers tend to trust leaders who they think are knowledgeable and able to help them solve problems in their teaching⁴⁹⁶.

⁴⁹³ Robinson, V. M. J. (2001). Embedding leadership in task performance. In K. Wong & C. Evers (Eds.), *Leadership for quality schooling: International perspectives* (pp. 90–102). London: Falmer Press.

⁴⁹⁴ For a discussion of the issue of educational expertise in lay governance, see Robinson, V. M. J., Ward, L., & Timperley, H. (2003). The difficulties of school governance: A layperson’s job? *Educational Management and Administration*, 31, pp. 263–281.

⁴⁹⁵ Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. L. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁴⁹⁶ Friedkin, N. E., & Slater, M. R. (1994). School leadership and performance: A social network approach. *Sociology of Education*, 67(2), pp. 139–157.

9.2 Implications for leadership assessment and development

This BES affirms that educational expertise is at the heart of educational leadership and that all educational leaders, including policy makers, need to be given rich opportunities to update and extend that expertise. Throughout the synthesis, our emphasis has been on *leadership* rather than *leaders*, because what matters most is increasing the prevalence, both within and beyond schools, of those practices that are associated with improved student outcomes. It is unreasonable to expect any one school leader to demonstrate high levels of capability on *all* the dimensions and their associated KSDs. The heroic approach to leadership that is implicit in such an expectation is fraught with problems and has discouraged many teachers from taking up more senior leadership roles. It is more reasonable to expect that all New Zealand schools can access high levels of expertise on all the dimensions, and that those who are responsible for appointing and appraising school leaders value and are able to assess such expertise. Where particular expertise is lacking, it should be sourced externally. Small schools will be much more dependent on external leadership expertise than will larger schools.

The development of leadership capability is the responsibility of both schools and government. The Ministry of Education has taken a leading role by instituting the national principal induction programme to prepare new principals for their responsibilities⁴⁹⁷; it also offers programmes for both aspiring and experienced principals⁴⁹⁸. While this BES was being written, the Ministry developed a framework to guide the design and delivery of professional learning opportunities for school principals⁴⁹⁹. Known as Kiwi Leadership for Principals (KLP), it aims to ensure that professional learning opportunities enhance principals' roles as educational leaders. The KLP framework was informed by drafts of this BES and is consistent with it, but it was not intended that the KLP would provide the evidence base, theoretical explanations, and illustrations of effective leadership practices that can be found here. Work is also underway to develop a document, *Tū Rangatira*, based on *te ao Māori*, for Māori-medium leaders.

There has been some discussion in the sector about the need for a 'Kiwi leadership' framework for middle managers such as department heads and curriculum leaders. In our view, an outcomes-linked, evidence-based approach to this task would yield leadership dimensions and practices that are broadly similar to those in this BES and the KLP. We say this because our synthesis is inclusive of the leadership of senior and middle managers and because there is considerable overlap in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that educational leaders require, whatever their particular roles may be. What does differ is the set of tasks for which a leader is responsible. In a small school, however, the principal undertakes all the leadership tasks that would be otherwise distributed among the members of a leadership team.

Principals have a key role to play in increasing the prevalence of pedagogical leadership practices in their schools. They do this by endorsing the leadership of teachers with relevant expertise, creating a culture of collective responsibility for student achievement and well-being, and leading and participating in teacher professional learning that is aligned to the school's priorities. We would argue that the processes involved in pedagogical improvement and in the development of pedagogical leadership have much in common.

Taking a human resource view, leadership is best developed by means of dedicated leadership development programmes. An alternative approach sees the development of educational leadership as an integral part of school improvement activities. The following quote explains the difference between the two approaches:

⁴⁹⁷ This programme, the First-time Principals' Programme, has been provided since inception by a team at the University of Auckland.

⁴⁹⁸ Since 2005, experienced principals have been able to attend the Principals' Development Planning Centre. In 2008, regional pilot programmes were started for aspiring principals.

⁴⁹⁹ Ministry of Education (2007c). *Kiwi leadership for principals: Informing principals' professional learning*. Wellington: Author.

What's missing in this [human resource] view is any recognition that improvement is more a function of *learning to do the right things* in the setting where you work than it is of what you know when you start to do the work. Improvement at scale is *largely a property of organizations*, not of the pre-existing traits of the individuals who work in them. Organizations that improve do so because they create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving, and they set in motion the internal processes by which people progressively learn how to do what they need to do in order to achieve what is worthwhile⁵⁰⁰.

Several of the New Zealand studies analysed in Chapter 6 show how development of pedagogical leadership can go hand in hand with school improvement. External facilitators and researchers taught teacher leaders how to build professional communities that achieved improved results for students and, in doing so, they increased the level and quality of the pedagogical leadership in the school⁵⁰¹.

Given the power of tools to shape leadership practice, the development of leadership tools should be part of a coordinated, national leadership development strategy. As we discussed in the context of teacher appraisal policies (see page 137), both smart and dumb tools can have an impact on leadership practice. National appraisal guidelines and indicators have been influential in shaping the appraisal policies of schools, yet they are misaligned with the policy's stated goal of improving teaching and learning and with the evidence about the kinds of teaching that increase students' opportunities to learn⁵⁰². The development of valid tools is a specialist job that requires researchers, design specialists, and practitioners to work together through iterative cycles of development, trialling, and revision.

The development of tools such as leadership exemplars would be a welcome outcome of this BES. Exemplars would illustrate how crucial leadership tasks such as appraisal, grouping, parent reporting, student discipline, and formulation of homework policies can be fulfilled in ways that impact positively on students. Developers and writers would need to be very familiar with the research evidence that identifies the particular qualities responsible for the positive impacts so that, for example, they can select schools with exemplary appraisal policies. Tools will be most effective if they embody the design principles discussed in Chapter 6 (see page 138) and if they are annotated to show how the selected examples incorporate the principles associated with effective task performance.

Consistent with our earlier point about approaches to leadership development, leadership capacity can be evaluated either by assessing leaders themselves or by assessing how well selected leadership tasks are performed. It is appropriate to assess leaders themselves for such purposes as appointment, appraisal, and promotion. This requires tools that are aligned to the dimensions identified in this BES and that, with appropriate training, trustees and external appraisers can use to assess whether current and aspiring leaders demonstrate the practices and KSDs associated with positive outcomes for students.

By assessing collective performance on selected leadership tasks, it is possible to obtain critical, system-wide feedback for policy makers and professional associations concerning the capacity

⁵⁰⁰ Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, p. 73.

⁵⁰¹ Examples of the development of pedagogical leadership through processes of school improvement can be found in:

Parr, J., Timperley, H., Reddish, P., Jesson, R., & Adams, R. (2006). *Literacy Professional Development Project: Identifying effective teaching and professional development practices for enhanced student learning. Milestone 5* (Final report). Wellington: Learning Media

and in:

Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Cavanagh, T., Teddy, L., & Clapham, S. (2006). *Te Kotahitanga phase 3: Whanaungatanga: Establishing a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations in mainstream secondary school classrooms*. Wellington: Ministry of Education Research Division, Māori Education Research Institute (MERI), and Poutama Pounamu Research and Development Centre.

⁵⁰² Sinnema, C., & Robinson, V. M. J. (2007). The leadership of teaching and learning: Implications for teacher evaluation. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 6(4), pp. 319–343.

of current leadership to implement government policies such as the new national curriculum. A consistent message coming out of the school improvement literature is that politicians and policy makers underestimate the magnitude of the learning that is needed to achieve policy goals⁵⁰³. The learning agenda for any policy initiative is a function of the match between what the initiative requires leaders to do and their present capacity to perform those roles. Careful research on this match should be used to inform the timing, resourcing, and frequency of the policy initiatives that school leaders are asked to implement.

We have outlined two approaches to assessing and developing leadership: assess and develop the leader or assess and improve the collective performance on selected leadership tasks. The two approaches are complementary. The first is required for human resource purposes; the second for raising system-wide performance. Appropriate tools and training are needed for both.

9.3 Reflections on research in educational leadership

This BES has highlighted an almost complete lack of connection between theories and research on leadership and educational outcomes for students. One indicator of this disconnection is the miniscule proportion of research on educational leadership that focuses on the leadership–outcomes relationship. Our systematic search of the international literature uncovered only 27 published, quantitative studies. We found that, of 127 New Zealand theses that had some relevance to educational leadership, only 12 included anything about student outcomes, and most of these were evaluations of small-scale interventions conducted by the research students themselves⁵⁰⁴.

The same disconnection is also apparent in some of the ways that leadership is theorised. Transformational leadership—one of the most influential theories used in educational research and in graduate programmes in educational administration—has its origins in leader–follower relationships, not in the quest to discover how educators can make a difference for students. The educational leadership research community has only recently begun to make links between the organisational and administrative processes of schools and their core business of teaching and learning. This is the very connection that school leaders are asked to make all the time yet, until relatively recently, researchers have provided them with little help in doing so.

Given the extent of this disconnection, it would be fair to characterise research on educational leadership as predominantly adult-centric. The underpinning theories have been concerned with the quality of adult–adult relationships rather than the impacts of leadership on students. The assumption seems to have been that, if leaders enjoy good relationships with their staff and community, the benefits will automatically flow through to students.

The same adult-centric thinking is found in some of the arguments for distributed leadership, which are grounded in theories of power rather than in theories of teaching and learning. For some of its advocates, distributed leadership is desirable because it counteracts concentration of power and authority in the hands of the principal or senior management team⁵⁰⁵. The problem with this argument is that school leadership is not there to run a democratic staffroom or provide opportunities for staff to collaborate or try their hands at leadership. It is there to develop and sustain teaching and learning practices that deliver valued outcomes for all students⁵⁰⁶. Whether distributing leadership in particular ways promotes such outcomes is

⁵⁰³ Fullan, M., Hill, P., & Crevola, C. (2006). *Breakthrough*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

⁵⁰⁴ See the New Zealand Education Theses Database. www.educationcounts.govt.nz/goto/BES

⁵⁰⁵ Goldstein, J. (2003). Making sense of distributed leadership: The case of peer assistance and review. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(4), pp. 397–421;

Harris, A. (2005). Leading or misleading? Distributed leadership and school improvement. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(3), pp. 255–265.

⁵⁰⁶ For a more extended argument about the normative basis of distributed leadership, see Robinson, V. M. J. (2008). Forging the links between distributed leadership and student outcomes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 46(2), pp. 241–256.

an open question to be addressed through both context-specific inquiry and research-based generalisation. A more educationally powerful argument for distributed leadership is the one we have used throughout this BES: the breadth and depth of expertise required to meet the challenges outlined in Chapter 2—not to mention the effort entailed—are beyond that of a lone principal or senior leadership team.

To be fair to leadership researchers, most of the published research on teacher professional learning has also been adult-centric. In this latter field, the criterion for effectiveness has typically been teacher change rather than improved outcomes for the students of the teachers involved⁵⁰⁷. As we acknowledged in Chapter 8, trusting relationships between teachers and leaders are critical to effective leadership. The challenge for leaders is to build and maintain positive relationships with staff while working with them to improve teaching and learning. The integration of these two imperatives is not advanced by assuming that good staff relationships automatically lead to benefits for students.

What would it take to build a stronger evidence base in New Zealand about the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes? First and foremost, it would require a database of student outcomes that are identifiable by school so that school-level leadership effects can be investigated. At least half of the 27 international studies reviewed for the meta-analysis in chapters 4 and 5 used student outcome data that was routinely collected by state and regional educational authorities. In some cases, data on selected leadership variables were also available from existing databases. Such a database allows researchers to rigorously sample schools, control for differences in student background, and identify schools that over at least two years outperform otherwise similar schools.

It is a consequence of the lack of such databases in New Zealand, at least at primary level, that very little quantitative, outcomes-linked leadership research has been conducted. In the absence of national databases, surrogate indicators, such as ERO reports, have become the means of identifying good schools and good school leadership. How valid these are is unknown because there are no publicly available studies that examine the relationship between them and student outcomes.

One of the reasons why New Zealand has so little school-linked data on student achievement is that political and professional leaders want to avoid the negative consequences of certain kinds of national assessment. There is, however, a body of research literature available on how to develop large-scale assessment and indicator systems in ways that avoid, on the one hand, the excesses of a high-stakes system and, on the other, the extreme of having no system at all until year 11⁵⁰⁸. A discussion of this literature is beyond the scope of this BES, but we have raised the issue of national databases because we have been repeatedly asked why there is so little New Zealand research on the links between leadership and student outcomes.

A further reason so little quantitative analysis of leadership–outcome links has been done in New Zealand is the critical shortage of educational researchers and analysts with the skills and experience necessary to work with large data sets. This shortage means that even the available data sets are not always analysed in ways that can inform policy decisions⁵⁰⁹. Urgent investment is needed to develop our capacity to conduct such research.

⁵⁰⁷ Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher professional learning and development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

⁵⁰⁸ For an account of the development of an indicator system in the UK, to which 6000 secondary schools voluntarily subscribe, see:
Fitz-Gibbon, C. T. (1996). *Monitoring education: Indicators, quality and effectiveness*. London: Cassell;
Fitz-Gibbon, C. T., & Tymms, P. (2002). Technical and ethical issues in indicator systems: Doing things right and doing wrong things. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10(6). Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n16/>

⁵⁰⁹ A 2001 report revealed that there were over 100 databases already existing within the Ministry, which, with appropriate secondary analyses, could yield valuable information about system performance. The same report also found substantial gaps in the representativeness of data and in cognitive outcomes at primary school level. At the secondary level, there were few measures of non-cognitive outcomes. Harker, R., Nash, R., Johnstone, P. E., & Hattie, J. (2001). *Secondary analysis: Scoping project*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

At different points in this BES, we have identified specific gaps in the research. Rather than repeat them here, we have focused on the reasons for them. The difficulty of obtaining school-linked student outcomes data is arguably one major factor. A second is the shortage of New Zealand leadership researchers, compounded with the fact that most of them have not pursued questions about pedagogical leadership or its links to student outcomes. Most of the New Zealand evidence we have drawn from comes from researchers on the improvement of teaching and learning—not those who identify themselves as leadership researchers. Even this group is very small: the number of researchers responsible for the evidence on which New Zealand’s most successful interventions are based is less than a dozen.

The critical question for policy makers, universities, and professional associations is not ‘What are the research gaps?’, but ‘How can we put conditions in place that will ensure the gaps are filled?’ These conditions include training more researchers who will pursue an agenda of educational leadership as leadership of the improvement of teaching and learning⁵¹⁰, constructing school-linked data sets that will support research on the links between school/department leadership and student outcomes, and developing a critical mass of researchers and analysts with the ability to analyse large data sets. Educational leadership research should be encouraged that informs policy makers about (i) the value of alternative policies, (ii) the capacity of leadership to implement particular policies, and (iii) the impact of those policies and initiatives on leadership capacity and student outcomes. In recent times, there has been an increased emphasis on pedagogical leadership in the graduate leadership and management programmes of several of our universities. It is our hope that this will lead to an increase in research into pedagogical leadership.

9.4 System supports for pedagogical leadership

Elmore, a leading scholar on school improvement and education policy, defines educational leadership as “the guidance and direction of instructional improvement”⁵¹¹. Improvement, he says, is:

change with direction, sustained over time, that moves entire systems, raising the average level of quality and performance while at the same time decreasing the variation among units, and engaging people in analysis of and understanding of why some actions seem to work and others don’t⁵¹².

The skills and knowledge that matter, he argues, are those that are directly connected to this purpose.

The New Zealand education system lacks the single-minded focus that Elmore insists is the key to raising student achievement. While the Ministry of Education’s strategic goals assert the importance of ‘raising achievement and reducing disparity’ and programmes such as the First-time Principals’ Programme and the pilot for aspiring principals all give priority to pedagogical leadership, this priority is not reflected in the way principals spend their time (Chapter 2). Administrative tasks take over the leadership agenda and leave principals with little time to provide pedagogical leadership. The same is probably true of heads of department in secondary schools⁵¹³.

There are likely to be a number of reasons New Zealand principals spend so little time on pedagogical leadership tasks. One may be the level of administrative support they are able

⁵¹⁰ For an account of this type of leadership, see:

Elmore, R. F. (2004). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, Chapter 2.

⁵¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵¹² *ibid.*

⁵¹³ Alison, J. (Personal communication, 24 October, 2007); and Wright, N. 2002. *Stories from the inside: A narrative analysis investigating the professional lives of three New Zealand secondary school heads of English departments*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Waikato, Hamilton.

to access. As outlined in Chapter 2, the principal and board are responsible for every area of school management. Principals, particularly in small rural schools, may lack the support that could relieve them of routine administrative duties. The 1998 TIMSS survey collected information about secondary school principals' use of time. According to their self-report, the principals of rural schools (which are more likely to be small) spent an average of 100 hours per month on administration. This compares with a mean of 79 hours for urban principals. That this data may reflect a resourcing issue is reinforced by the fact that the mean for principals of independent schools (which are likely to be better resourced) was just 51 hours⁵¹⁴. More recent data from state schools (reported in Chapter 2) suggest that principals may be using too much of their time on activities that, according to our findings, have minimal or no impact on student outcomes.

Another reason some principals allocate time as they do may relate to the confidence with which they approach their different responsibilities. People do what they feel comfortable with; some principals, particularly those who were inducted into the management culture of the early Tomorrow's Schools era, may find it easier to engage with management issues than to provide pedagogical leadership. Principals not only need space in their workloads to provide such leadership, they need opportunities to learn how to do this well.

A similar pattern of management responsibilities overwhelming pedagogical leadership probably exists for other school leaders, such as heads of department and trustees. Trustees say that they want to spend more time on strategic and educational issues (Chapter 2) but that they have had little systemic support in doing so. A look at the New Zealand School Trustees Association's *Trustee Handbook* suggests this may be true. Of its 588 pages, 208 deal with 31 pieces of legislation that are binding on boards⁵¹⁵. It offers trustees no educational guidance and no illustrations of how they might fulfil their statutory obligation to be accountable for student achievement. This misalignment between the content of the handbook and the educational purpose of schools is to be partly addressed in a revision to be published later this year. Some of the other publications and training⁵¹⁶ that STA provides for board members do offer insight into educational goals and how to measure them, but there remains a tension between the need to help trustees negotiate the procedural requirements associated with working in a Crown agency setting and the need to provide trustees with the educational knowledge that will enable them to oversee the educational performance of their schools.

School leaders make a difference for their students through a determined and sustained focus on priorities for student achievement and well-being, alignment of activities and resources to those priorities, an iterative cycle of inquiry into progress, and ongoing adjustment of the strategies by which priorities are pursued. To achieve their goals, many schools will need to recruit and develop additional expertise, and they will have to make a considerable investment in terms of staff time. The investment is more likely to be made and sustained in a national system in which goals, structures, and regulatory framework are strongly aligned with a pedagogical leadership agenda.

In the last two years, considerable progress has been made in New Zealand in recognising the importance of such leadership development and putting in place a development framework that has pedagogical leadership as its clear priority.⁵¹⁷ The overarching goal of the framework is to embed knowledge about what improves outcomes for every student into the daily practice of school leaders. Resources are being invested in leadership development for middle and senior leaders, aspiring principals, and both new and experienced principals in English- and Maori medium settings. Several of the programmes are designed to integrate school and leadership

⁵¹⁴ These figures are drawn from Chamberlain, M., & Caygill, R. (2002). *The school and classroom context for year 9 students' mathematics and science achievement*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Table 3.9, p. 45.

⁵¹⁵ These figures refer to the New Zealand School Trustees Association (2004), *Trustee Handbook*. Wellington: Author.

⁵¹⁶ For example, STA's Get on Board professional development programme. www.nzsta.org.nz

⁵¹⁷ Ministry of Education, Professional Leadership Plan 2009–10.

www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/The-Professional-Leadership-Plan

development by supporting participants as they attempt to improve teaching and learning in areas for which they are responsible. With strong formative research in place and sustained dialogue between practitioners, providers, policy makers and researchers⁵¹⁸, these leadership development strategies have the potential for greatly increasing the positive impacts of educational leadership on the social and academic outcomes of New Zealand students.

⁵¹⁸ For an account of the theory and practice of learning-focused partnerships between these four groups, see Annan, B. (2006). *A theory of schooling improvement: Connectivity and consistency to improve instructional practice*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

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Note: All Best Evidence Synthesis Programme publications can be accessed at www.educationcounts.govt.nz/goto/BES

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Glossary of Māori terms

Ako	Teaching and learning, understood as a single, reciprocal process
Hapū	Sub-tribe
Hui	Meeting, gathering, usually with a specific kaupapa
Iwi	People, nation, tribe
Kaiako	Teacher, instructor
Kanohi ki te kanohi	Face to face
Kaumātua	Elder, old man or woman, adult
Kaupapa	Purpose, agenda
Koro	Male elder, old man, grandfather
Kuia	Female elder, old woman, grandmother
Kura	School
Kura kaupapa Māori	Māori-medium school with an identifiable philosophical base (e.g., Te Aho Matua)
Kura whānau	The support network of families and extended families associated with a school
Ngāti	Prefix denoting tribe
Pākehā	New Zealand-born non-Māori, especially those of European descent
Pāngarau	Mathematics
Pānui	Reading
Pōwhiri	Formal welcome or opening ceremony
Taonga	Prized possession, treasure, inheritance
Te Aho Matua	Literally, the central thread; the philosophical statement that guides the operations of many kura
Te Kotahitanga	A professional development intervention for non-Māori teachers of Māori in English-medium schools. For a description of this intervention, see Case 7 (Establishing a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations) in Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007), <i>Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis</i> . See also the Te Kotahitanga website: http://edlinked.soe.waikato.ac.nz/departments/index.php?dept_id=20
Te reo Māori	The Māori language
Te reo Māori me ōna tikanga	Māori language and customs
Tikanga	The usual and accepted procedure or way of doing things; protocol
Tuhituhi	Writing
Tumuaki	Principal, head teacher, leader
Whakapapa	Ancestry, genealogy
Whānau	Family, to be understood in a much more encompassing sense than the nuclear family; network of mutual supports and obligations
Whanaungatanga	Sense of kinship, family, belonging

Mo ngā tamariki, kia rua ngā reo. Ko te reo o ngā mātua tipuna tuatahi, ko te reo o tauwi tuarua. Kia ōrite te pakari o ia reo, kia tu tangata ai ngā tamariki i roto i te ao Māori, i roto hoki i te ao o tauwi.

I runga i tēnei whakaaro, kia tere pakari ai te reo o ngā tamariki, me whakahaere ngā mahi katoa o te kura i roto i te reo Māori. Tae atu ki te hunga kuhu mai ki roto i te kura, me kōrero Māori katoa, i ngā wā katoa.

Kura kaupapa Māori, therefore:

- respect all languages;
- expect full competency in Māori and English for the children of the kura;
- affirm that total immersion most rapidly develops language competence and assert that the language of the kura be, for the most part, exclusively Māori.

Te Aho Matua o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori.
English interpretation by Dr Kāterina Te Heikōkō Mataira