PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FACILITATION PRACTICES THAT ENHANCE SECONDARY SCHOOL MIDDLE LEADER EFFECTIVENESS

Dr Camilla Highfield and Dr Jenny Robertson
Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, Auckland

Abstract

This paper reports the methods and findings from a research project investigating the professional learning and development (PLD) facilitation practices that influence and support the development of middle leaders in secondary schools. The participants for this research are expert facilitators employed by the University of Auckland delivering services through a large-scale government funded professional learning and development project in New Zealand secondary schools. The results show that there are a considerable number of complex and interrelated facilitation practices that rely on prior curriculum and pedagogical knowledge as well as the development of skills in coaching, evaluative inquiry, modelling and building relational trust. Implications for the training and support of professional learning and development of facilitators will be discussed.

Background

An examination of the literature reveals that little is known about deliberate facilitation practices that influence change and develop effective middle leaders in underperforming secondary schools. What is known is that external expertise is critical in changing teacher and leader practice (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). This external expertise is often provided in the form of professional learning and development (PLD) by experienced facilitators or coaches. School leaders and teachers wanting to change and improve outcomes for their students often engage educational experts who are generally experienced, well qualified professionals with knowledge about evidence-based intervention strategies likely to make a difference in a particular schooling context. Effective facilitation of professional learning demands individuals who are prepared to challenge and question the status quo and focus on an improvement mind-set when they are working with their teacher and leader colleagues in a school. Facilitators aim to develop leaders and teachers as active, decision-making professionals who are able to respond to the uncertain and changing demands of leading learning and teaching in ways that promote better outcomes for learners (Le Fevre, Ell, Timperley, Twyford, & Mayo, 2014; Timperley, Kaser, & Halbert, 2014). An approach to professional learning that promotes teachers engaging with the individual background of students to systematize a relationship based way of working and adjusting their practice accordingly is strongly promoted and ideally modelled by facilitators. Sleeter, Bishop and Meyer (2011) argue that professional development for teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy can make a positve impact on outcomes for minority students . This approach involves facilitators supporting teachers to hold high academic expectations of their students, act on cultural competence by re-shaping curriculum and building on students' funds of knowledge and cultivating students critical consciousness regarding power relations (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The professional development context for this research project involves facilitators working in schools with large proportions of indigenous and minority students, so this approach is critical to their facilitation practice.

In this paper we describe the contribution that PLD facilitation makes to middle leadership practice in

secondary schools to justify the view that investing in the development of middle leaders will have longer-term effects on improving teaching and learning at department level. We propose that the intervention strategies and practices of facilitators who work with middle leaders with a focus on both transformational and pedagogical leadership (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) can lead to improved middle leadership effectiveness, with positive gains for students in their department (Highfield, 2012). To develop these characteristics, skills and abilities in middle leaders, facilitators must have expert knowledge to be able to coach others in the development of such attributes.

A key disposition required by facilitators delivering PLD that aims to change the practice of professionals in a school is *adaptive expertise* (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). This term describes several qualities related to teaching and facilitation practice that distinguishes it from routine expertise. Bransford et al. (2009) describe adaptive expertise as the ability to verbalise the principles underlying one's skills, judge conventional and unconventional versions of skills as appropriate and modify or invent skills according to local constraints. Highly complex environments, such as the work of facilitating professional learning for change and improvement, demands people are able to problem solve in novel situations and respond flexibly, efficiently and effectively to resistance of colleagues and complex educational environments where there could be multiple issues that require addressing (Le Fevre et al., 2014). In the context of schooling improvement, these practices are exemplified in the way facilitators deploy knowledge and ideas in complex school environments that focus on learning and change for the purpose of improving valued outcomes. Adaptive expertise draws on deep conceptual knowledge and a well-honed skill set that acknowledges that routine expertise is also an important mechanism for change as long as it is constantly evaluated for effectiveness. Adaptive expertise is driven by inquiry and is responsive to a particular context or situation. Le Fevre et al. (2014) have identified five enablers as central to the facilitators' capacity to be responsive in ways that create generative improvement within school contexts. These are: being constantly metacognitive; co-theorising through an evaluative inquiry stance; having and promoting agency; working systemically; and using and developing deep conceptual knowledge. This framework for considering adaptive expertise of facilitators will be used as a 'lens' to analyse the practices and dispositions described by the facilitators who participated in this research project.

In order to gain credibility in a secondary school context, facilitators need to possess a deep knowledge of the pedagogical content and assessment practices related to teaching and learning in relation to their subject expertise whilst having the skills to model that expertise with the teachers and leaders they work with. Facilitator practice is fundamentally underpinned by the knowledge of teaching and learning they want to develop in the middle leaders they are working with. Powerful learning is evidenced through developing deep knowledge about important ideas and their associated practices. Effective facilitators support the leaders and teachers to connect new ideas to existing knowledge using inquiry to encourage questioning, coherence and an understanding of the purpose of change (Ell et al., 2013). Pellegrino (2012) supports a concept of learning that develops deeper learning associated with the understanding of fundamental disciplinary concepts combined with knowledge created in a form that makes it retrievable, usable and transferable across contexts. The adaptive expertise of a facilitator will ensure this knowledge transfer occurs when working with middle leaders to extend their teaching and leadership practice.

Middle leaders' influence on teacher effectiveness within a department, and the extent to which teacher leadership can act as a catalyst for improving practice in the classroom (Harris & Muijs, 2005) informed the methodology for the professional learning and development intervention strategies that are the focus of this study. In the secondary school setting, the principal relies on the department leaders to provide the instructional and pedagogical advice and expertise required for effective leadership at department level. Hofman, Hofman, and Guldemond (2001) assert that a great deal of the educational decision-making is being transferred to department heads. These studies have linked specific dispositions and capacities to

positive academic outcomes because when middle leaders make leadership decisions that have "students at the centre" (Ministry of Education, 2007), there is an identifiable impact on the quality of the teaching in the department. When the key leadership practices are missing at whole-school and department level or are dysfunctional, students do not appear to be so well served by their teachers (Harris, 1998). The specific practices employed by middle leaders to create the working conditions that motivate teachers in ways that relate positively to student outcomes are a key driver for improvement and, therefore, are the focus of the intervention strategies employed by facilitators delivering expertise in this field.

Middle leadership practices that are associated with successful outcomes for students are rare but are described in a range of studies throughout the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Dinham, 2007; Harris, 1998, 1999; Harris, Jamieson, & Russ, 1995; Sammons, Thomas, & Mortimore, 1997). An Australian study conducted in 38 schools (Dinham, 2007) describes middle leaders with personal qualities and relationships whose commitment, energy and enthusiasm for teaching motivated those around them. The department leaders were experienced and effective teachers who possessed depth and breadth of knowledge themselves. They had a sound understanding of curricula and of current developments in their field consistently demonstrating pedagogical leadership of teachers in their department. Their transformational leadership practices were demonstrated through being effective department advocates and well-respected school community members (Robinson et al., 2009). Their networking ability helped them operate politically within the school culture and secure department resources. These middle leaders influenced evidence-based department planning and organization, ensured resources were well used and took a leading role in programming. They facilitated policy development with their staff, which aided effective communication. Evaluation and reporting were always well documented and accessible. The researchers who conducted a large-scale British study (Sammons et al., 1997) drew attention to the importance of an academic emphasis in the department alongside a caring pastoral environment. In the high-performing departments students were able to learn independently and there was evidence of consistently high-quality teaching with low staff turnover.

Identifying the key middle leadership practices that enhance teacher practice and predict improved student academic outcomes in order to understand how these can be influenced, were critical drivers for facilitators working in this field. To utilise their in-depth content and pedagogical knowledge to change teacher and middle leader practice, a facilitator must act as a coach. While coaching has been used for many purposes, it can be a means for developing learning in context. Robertson (2005) argues that coaching allows curriculum middle leaders to be challenged and to reflect on how improving their practice can make a difference to student outcomes. Robertson states that coaching is a reciprocal process, which involves at least two people working together to set and achieve professional goals. The essence of coaching is dialogue, which is focussed on the improvement of practice.

Coaching is situational and is best practised in the context of the leader's everyday working situation, in this case the school. This allows the middle leader to practise and develop on the job and is often referred to as "just in time learning" (Clutterbuck, 2007; Robertson, 2005). Robertson (2004) suggests "coaching also provides opportunities for affirmation and validation of practice, which is important in leadership development" (p. 7). There is evidence to show that leaders who undertake coaching development programmes often use these strategies with others; they are able to identify and promote the potential of others through using coaching strategies that they have experienced (Robertson, 2005). It is important for teachers and leaders to learn in authentic contexts as they progress through their daily challenges and facilitators working in this intervention have provided that opportunity.

The literature contains numerous models of coaching. Clutterbuck (2007) describes a continuum with traditional coaching at one end and developmental coaching at the other. In a traditional coaching model,

the coach's style is directive: the coach helps the person being coached by clarifying a goal, and working with them to achieve the goal through instruction, demonstration, observation, monitoring and giving feedback. Developmental coaching is non-directive. The coach uses skilful questioning to help the coached person develop an understanding of the internal and external forces that are restricting the achievement of their goals. Out of this questioning comes a further goal or goals chosen by the coached person. The coach then helps the coached person build and sustain motivation to achieve their goals and is available for further stimulation and to support reflection. Key actions in this model are questioning, self-management of the coached person's experimentation, observation and self-feedback. We would argue that skilled facilitators use adaptive expertise in the way that they cohesively draw on various coaching practices depending on the context in which they are working and the needs and motivation of the coached person. Whatever the model, its measurement of success should be related to deep changes in practice.

The New Zealand Context

The New Zealand secondary school system is one of high performance and low equity (McNaughton, Robinson, & Timperley, 2011), with Māori and Pasifika students over-represented in the statistics for students performing below expectations. Underpinning the professional development contract described in this paper are the current government's 'Better Public Services' goals (Ministry of Education, 2011). Through a high level cross-sector approach, these goals aim to create a public sector more responsive to the needs and expectations of New Zealanders. A key education goal is that school leavers will have qualifications allowing them to succeed in a highly skilled workforce and/or access further training and higher-level tertiary learning opportunities.

New Zealand secondary schools are structured like many others in western countries where curriculum subjects are taught by a team of teachers organised into departments. In New Zealand secondary schools, the eight essential learning areas in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) - Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Learning Languages, Mathematics and Statistics, Social Sciences, Science, and Technology - are often used for organisational purposes. Secondary school departments are usually led by a head of department. Other designated leaders have accountability for subjects within the learning area such as Head of Biology or a year level such as Head of Junior English.

Context for this research project

Professional learning and development facilitators in New Zealand work in a complex and ever- changing environment. The fundamental purpose for their employment is to support teachers and leaders to learn and improve their practice in ways that will lead to improved student outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2008). Secondary Student Achievement (SSA) is a government-funded PLD initiative that aims to improve educational outcomes for students, in accordance with current school improvement priorities (Ministry of Education, 2016). In secondary schools, student achievement of NCEA qualifications is the main outcome measure of school improvement (NZQA, 2014).

The University of Auckland is the PLD provider for the northern region allocation of the contract. This region includes two thirds of New Zealand's secondary schools and is where most of the priority learner population of Māori and Pasifika students live and go to school. Up to 40 schools throughout the region are allocated PLD support by local Ministry of Education personnel who evaluate which schools require specialist expertise based on student achievement data. The PLD delivery model was contracted to focus on the development of the curriculum middle leaders and their pedagogical leadership of subject specialist

teachers to achieve improved outcomes for priority learners in their department. The PLD provider employs 25 facilitators who are subject specialist teachers and leaders with experience as secondary school middle leaders and a proven record of student success based on sound pedagogy and detailed curriculum and assessment knowledge.

The processes and procedures of the intervention researched for this study, require facilitators to scope the professional needs of middle leaders and teachers in order to provide an in-depth, tailored and strategic response to the school with a strong focus on pedagogical practices and inquiry for a minimum of one year (Ministry of Education, 2008). Detailed scoping by facilitators results in the development of a professional learning action plan and the inquiry-based approach expected at all levels of school organisation (from whole school self-review through to classroom level teaching as inquiry). This approach is based on considerable evidence that, even in very challenging situations, leadership teams are able to transform their settings through engaging in evidence-informed collaborative inquiry (Timperley et al., 2014). While this is a responsive approach unique to each school, the middle leader professional learning needs that emerge in these schools contain common areas for development.

Methodology

A two-phase process was planned to gather qualitative data from PLD facilitators currently employed to deliver SSA PLD. To satisfy university requirements for reporting findings beyond the usual contract milestone reporting requirements, ethical approval for the study was applied for and granted by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. The data collection processes took place toward the end of the fourth year of the SSA contract provision in October-November 2015.

Phase One

The first data collection phase took the form of a workshop for 19 participants. The identity of participants was protected by using a facilitator unknown to the participants who ensured all documentation delivered to the researchers had no names or other identifying information. During the workshop, facilitators independently completed a written task on a proforma template. The task required participants to provide a detailed account of facilitation practice which had resulted in observable, enhanced middle leader practice, and improved educational outcomes for priority students.
Facilitators were required to reflect on and summarise a mminimum of four aspects of PLD.

The researchers designed the template based on the preceding four years of middle leader practice data reported in contract milestone documents to The Ministry of Education. These included: using data (to inform learning programme design, planning and teaching decisions); inquiry-based approaches; programme design and planning embedded in *The New Zealand Curriculum;* teacher pedagogy; assessment – formative practices and/or NCEA; and any other aspects of PLD practice considered to be important.

This workshop provided a pragmatic and economic method to gather breadth of evidence from facilitators about key aspects of facilitated PLD that could then be analysed in a systematic way. In this way, faciltiators helped to answer key research questions about the extent to which facilitators could identify their own deliberate acts of facilitation, link it to middle leaders changing their practice and the subsequent impact on student academic outcomes.

During the workshop, participants also shared their reflections in a guided peer review of a colleague's response. This process provided feedback and recommendations for changes to their responses to ensure

the material submitted to the researchers contained relevant and meaningful responses that fairly reflected the intent of the guiding questions. Initial analysis of the workshop data informed the subsequent individual interviews with facilitators.

Phase two

Phase two consisted of individual interviews with 16 facilitators. Initial analysis of the phase one data identified the need to gather more detailed data about the exact nature of, rationale for and processes involved in, a facilitator's work when they engage with a middle leader in a school with the purpose of enhancing their pedagogical and leadership practice. A single question was asked of each participant and the interviews lasted for 20-30 minutes; this allowed an in-depth response and the opportunity for researchers to utilise probe questions. The facilitator was asked to focus on, and describe in detail, features of a self-selected example of a successful intervention with a middle leader in a secondary school. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and returned to facilitators to check for intended meaning and final approval to use for the study.

These interviews provided an opportunity to explore in far more depth the exact nature of the practices the facilitator engaged in when working with middle leaders, which practices led onto others, how barriers were overcome, and the extent to which the new middle leader practices impacted on teachers in the department and subsequently on student outcomes.

Analysis

The phase one workshop data was summarised for the frequency with which each section was completed by participants, and also scored by each researcher for the quality of the response for each selected aspect of practice.

As the focus of the analysis was both the frequency of reporting of practices and the quality of the descriptions of the practice, data from both phases was treated as a single data set bringing together breadth of responses from the workshop with depth of responses from the interviews.

Using a similar approach as Le Fevre et al. (2014), inductive analysis was used to describe the recurrently reported acts of facilitation practice evident in the data from both phases. To frame the discussion, a process of deductive analysis was used to assess the alignment of
responses with the 'enablers of adaptive expertise' identified in this earlier study.

Results

Workshop and interview participants were asked to focus their feedback on an example of their PLD provision where successful outcomes had been achieved, that is, middle leaders (and their teachers) had changed their practice in ways that led to improved outcomes for students. In this paper, we are not reporting actual student achievement outcomes as evidence of effective facilitation practice, as these are a feature of confidential contract reports to the Ministry of Education, but focussing on the deliberate acts of PLD that led to these outcomes (Ell et al., 2013).

The results presented below are based on the recurrent themes emerging from the inductive analysis of both phases of the project, with interview extracts provided to illustrate each theme.

Theme 1: Facilitators begin an intervention strategy by encouraging middle leaders to use student achievement data as the basis for professional learning conversations to determine what changes need to be made to teaching, learning and leadership practices.

Data repeatedly showed that all facilitators understood the importance of the critical and challenging conversation with middle leaders about student achievement data at department level, as an essential starting point in the PLD interventions. They coached middle leaders in the use and analysis of student achievement data, particularly the disaggregation of data to determine patterns of achievement for priority students, and monitoring and tracking progress over time.

> *when I first spoke to the middle leader, I think probably the first thing we did was analyse the data for the previous year in quite a lot of detail and think about what the problem was, if there was a problem....we started to show them whole school data, the next level was to go to him and say, "Oh can we look at last year's results?" And although they weren't, they were just looking at the total numbers, they weren't really breaking it down into classes, you're not really getting into the nitty gritty of the teachers..... So he wasn't really disaggregating the data very well by teacher, so he wasn't looking at the different groups very much. (Science facilitator)*

Theme 2: Facilitators encourage middle leaders to investigate how and what students in their department want to learn, to inform professional learning conversations about leadership practice.

Facilitators supported and encouraged middle leaders to collect and use student voice that was then used to inform overall programme design and select appropriate learning contexts that engaged priority learners.

> *I set up journaling.... I explained what I wanted and from the kids' point of view. I wanted her to set up a five-minute period at the end of each class to, for the kids to record something, in the way we normally do. "I learned..." "I would like to learn more about..." Or something, giving them lead-ins, and then eventually they will pick and do it on their own. And [middle leader] tried this and the thing that I asked of her was that after the class she would email me ..... So she said to me she's changed some of the questions she asks kids. She doesn't have in her head she is going to teach anymore as much as she once did, because what happens in the classroom now flexes and bends and moves. .... So for her that's being empowered to be herself. (Maths facilitator)*

> *So we asked teachers, from all of their technology classes from Year 9 through to Year 13, to choose two students. One being a student that was actively engaged in learning and one that was disengaged. So we didn't say achievement, we just said, engagement. And we, well they designed a survey for these students based on those quality teaching and learning indicators. Then the HOD sat down with the staff again and said, "Here's the evidence, here's the feedback." (Technology facilitator)*

Theme 3: Facilitators make quicker progress in changing the practices of middle leaders and building knowledge when they take time to build relationships and are responsive to middle leader's unique school contexts.

All facilitators took time to get to know the people they were working with, their cultural and professional background, level of professional expertise, and confidence. They were responsive to the identity and culture of the middle leader they worked with and the dynamics of learning area departments were well understood.

> *So I'd begun to form a relationship with her last year and then I was able to continue that relationship right from the beginning of this year. I believe that the way to move forward with*

[middle leader] and the department and to start seeing some results for those students was to convey that I had faith in her ability.... At the beginning of the year I said to [middle leader] "we're going to turn this around." So I sort of went in with fairly positive and forceful and high expectations. And I said, "I know you can do it, I know the department can do it." (English facilitator)

Theme 4: Facilitators are adaptive to situations or contexts and employ coaching skills in their practice.

The skills of coaching dominated facilitators' descriptions of their practice as they supported middle leaders to change/shift their practice, set goals and so on. (Although 'coaching' and 'mentoring' were terms used interchangeably by facilitators, their descriptions made it clear that their practice was coaching as defined in the literature.)

And I said, "Okay, it's just something to think about." And the next time I came in they said, "Oh look we tried it with students that we thought were less at risk and the kids were just amazing." They were going, "Oh Miss show me where I'm at." And they said it was incredibly powerful and they never anticipated that the students would respond so favourably to seeing that they were doing woefully. Because I broke down the data for them and said, "Look you need to show them how many credits they'll be getting, you really need to promote your subject, you need to promote the fact that science is actually going to be the thing that's going to get them their UE and get them subject endorsement and this and the other." (Science facilitator).

Theme 5: Facilitators modelling effective leadership and teaching practice for middle leaders.

Facilitators modelled aspects of middle leader practice by demonstrating how to perform a leadership activity and then providing an opportunity for the middle leader to repeat and further develop the activity. This strategy supported middle leaders to lead the development of the pedagogical practices of teachers in their department to shift classroom dynamics and encourage discursive and dialogic classroom practices.

So I suppose that sets the scene too, because I'm trying to model to him what he would do with his other teachers. So what I'm doing with him in the classroom and afterwards I would want him to do, and I explained that. So I try and model all the things that I'm doing with him he will be doing with his teachers. (Science facilitator)

Theme 6: Facilitators modelled an inquiry-based process to support middle leaders in identifying key areas for improvement in their department.

Facilitators noted the need to explain and model effective inquiry practices for middle leaders, that make critical use of data and evidence. This included the interrogation of data to identify problems of practice and the facilitator tracking the progress of the inquiry and adopting the role of the 'critical friend'.

...so they knew what quality teaching was. So the next step was then to test whether or not that was happening (in the department). So from the list of quality teaching we, as a department, developed an observation tool and they observed each other. And I, along with the middle leader, went in together and observed them teaching, with the view that if the middle leader was going to do her own inquiry, she was then going to model it with them. And they could use the evidence from this as their evidence for their own inquiries. So that was undertaken, then we collected student voice..... And she did it one-on-one, but she kind of had an epiphany at this stage and she said to me, "I'm going to change my inquiry because I've worked it out, it's not, well it is the fact that quality teaching is an issue, but really it's about my inability to have those difficult conversations with them about their teaching." (Technology facilitator)

Theme 7: Facilitators recognising how their own facilitation practices could influence change in middle leaders.

Facilitators showed a cognitive understanding of facilitation practices - as distinct from school-based teaching and leadership practices - being used and applied in various contexts. That is, as expert teachers they had transferred from being effective classroom practitioners to adaptive facilitators working with adult colleagues whose practice requires development. They acknowledged the tension, but recognised the need for adherence to expected facilitation practice by avoiding the temptation to: 'tell' the middle leader what to do; model teaching strategies in a vacuum; teach the students themselves; hand out readymade resources; or to do 'for', rather than 'with'. Facilitators reported their resistance to getting drawn into urgent, reactive tasks such as NCEA senior assessment marking and moderating of high stakes assessment tasks.

> *We modelled it, practiced it. We did feedback to the teachers together with her leading but me supporting her. And they were, the first couple were really good. When I backed off and let her lead I suppose that's, she had a couple of issues with that and she acknowledges that, she would say that it was a huge learning process for her. Because she was a new middle leader and because she had come from within, didn't feel she could question the other teachers, but that was a self-imposed perception. (Technology facilitator)*

Theme 8: Facilitators require deep pedagogical content knowledge (PCK).

The in-depth learning area and wider curriculum knowledge of facilitators, as well as their detailed pedagogical content knowledge for supporting middle leaders to navigate planning decisions leading to high stakes secondary school assessment (NCEA), featured strongly in the responses. This knowledge was described as being critical in gaining respect from the middle leaders and ensured that advice and guidance led to more effective practice.

> *….And so we sat down and looked at strategies around improving the submission [of NCEA assessments]. And some of the things we looked at were actually teaching the skills that are needed. You know, not saying to the students, here is a topic go away and do this. It was actually, so let's be smart about this, a random topic is not going to mean anything to them, let's look at a unit of work that you are doing, so you're doing written text, you're doing poetry. So how about teaching poetry and how the different techniques and the ideas and everything come together. And then giving the students a task of finding another poem by that poet and teaching that to the class knowing. And so we looked at, for example, genre, what is a genre of poetry, and what does this particular poet, what are the commonality in their work? And how does the poem that you have found and that's spoken to you? How does that embrace the time that the poet was living in, the poet's feelings? And that worked remarkably well because I said to the middle leader, "You can't be picky about the poets that they choose because if they choose a poem that resonates with them and as long as it's not, you know, kind of a rap song that's full of expletives, they should be allowed to analyse it, they should be allowed to talk about it, they should be able to link it to their own world." And so this year there was a 100% submission rate for that and there was a 100% achievement rate. (English facilitator)*

Theme 9: Facilitators understood that it was critical to develop middle leaders with effective pedagogy for longer-term sustainable outcomes.

Facilitators showed understanding of the objective to develop middle leader practice, in particular pedagogical leadership. Middle leaders need to develop effective strategies for enhancing teaching and learning in their department.

> *The teacher explained to me now I can see why, now it makes perfectly logical sense to me as to why that you look across the school and that you take responsibility for the student not just*

in your area but the student and their ability across the school. (Social Science facilitator)

Theme 10: Facilitators clearly understand how the government policy context influences schooling.
Facilitators were clearly able to articulate that the focus of their work with middle leaders was on improving teaching in a way that targeted priority students at risk of underachieving and raising their levels of achievement. This requirement is embedded in current government policy and school charters.

> *And then we pulled out the key documents that sit behind teaching, best practice teaching. So we looked at Pasifika Education Plan, Ka Hikitia, Success for All, ERO reports, quality indicators and obviously the Practising Teacher Competencies. (Technology facilitator)*

Discussion

The discussion for this paper is framed around two main research questions. The first is to understand the extent to which these descriptive results reveal the practices facilitators use when working to develop the capability of middle leaders in secondary schools. The second relates to the 'enablers of adaptive expertise' Le Fevre et al. (2014) and evidence of these within the facilitators' descriptions of their practice. In this section. the researchers also identify the aspects of adaptive expertise and concepts of agency that require further investigation to determine if and where these theoretical discourses feature in secondary sector PLD facilitation practice.

The participants in the investigation repeatedly emphasised the importance of grounding all PLD decisions in data, especially student achievement and progress data, student voice and, to some degree, data collected from their observations of middle leader and teacher practice (Hattie, 2015; Timperley et al., 2014). Although the evidence was variable, it was nonetheless apparent in some accounts of facilitator practice that they spent time building relationships and being responsive to middle leaders' unique schooling contexts (Harris, 2001). Similarly, some reported employing a range of identified and named PLD facilitation practices such as coaching (Clutterbuck, 2007) and mentoring practices. There was some confusion about the difference between coaching and mentoring practices, but descriptions of practice clearly showed that these were examples of coaching.

Facilitators consistently reported a focus on adopting inquiry-based processes for guiding the change process required when working with middle leaders. Their written responses and interview comments reflected an ability to identify what needs to change, how to plan for change and how to evaluate the outcomes of changed practice (Timperley et al., 2007; Timperley et al., 2014). Facilitators draw on and demonstrate high levels of curriculum specialist pedagogical content knowledge, especially as it relates to learning area and subject teaching in senior secondary school, and the assessment system that accompanies this (NZQA, 2014). They also have an understanding of relevant government priorities and Ministry of Education policies underpinning the PLD provision and how these can be enacted in middle leadership practice in secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2016). Facilitators consistently demonstrated an understanding of facilitation practice as distinct from their previous middle leader and teaching practices. There were clear descriptions in the data that reflected facilitators' understanding of the range of practices and tasks of pedagogical leadership they knew to be integral to middle leader practice (Robinson et al., 2009; Ministry of Education, 2012).

The interview transcripts did not show evidence of facilitators being constantly metacognitive and explaining why they had made particular facilitation decisions. Deliberate acts of observable and named facilitation practices that were noticeably under-reported were the observation of teachers in class, and modelling to middle leaders how to give constructive feedback. When facilitators modelled classroom

teaching strategies, this was not accompanied by deliberate and purposeful observation by the middle leader. Culturally responsive practice (Sleeter, 2011) was named or implied but less apparent was how this was experienced or understood by the middle leaders they were working with. Having challenging or difficult conversations was occasionally mentioned, particularly in relation to the confronting nature of student achievement data that reflected poorly on teachers and middle leaders. However, overt links between facilitator practice and changes in middle leader and teacher practice that impact on student outcomes were seldom made. Facilitators often commented on course planning and structure being altered at department level, based on their advice, as a way of increasing the number of worthwhile NCEA credits students were able to attempt. In the twenty plus hours of interview transcripts there was no mention of any deliberate reflection on their own facilitation practice or any evaluative strategies they used. However, we need to consider that some of these under-reported or omitted features we expected to hear about in some accounts of practice may be a function of the interview question(s) and the limited opportunities provided within the 20-30 minute interview. The purpose of this project as a pilot study was to firstly document what these secondary sector PLD facilitators do in practice, in preparation for delving more deeply into effective practice and asking questions about 'how' and 'why' facilitation decisions are made.

The enablers of adaptive expertise (Le Fevre et al., 2014) were most apparent in the ways facilitators described how they 'worked systematically' across different levels of school organisation and systems integral to these, as well as wider schooling considerations. Their ability to use and promote deep conceptual knowledge, especially in relation to curriculum and assessment processes, and, to some degree, knowledge of pedagogical leadership practices was readily apparent. Co-theorising through an evaluative inquiry stance was less in evidence in the data collected in this research but the methods employed did not include observations from progress meetings with other PLD facilitation colleagues working in the same school, as this was not the focus of this study.

At a surface level, the present evidence would suggest that facilitators 'have and promote agency' if the agency is taken to mean having the capacity to act – that is, facilitators themselves have agency and they promote (the development of) agency in others. However, applying the enabler of 'having and promoting agency' to the current data is problematic given the elusive and variable understandings of this concept and the education sector's recurrent use of, but omission to clearly define, the concept. We favour the ecological explanation of (teacher) agency proposed by Biesta, Priestly & Robinson (2015) for its apparent fit with the notion of adaptive expertise described by Le Fevre et al. (2014). Briefly, an ecological notion of agency sees it not as something teachers (or in this case facilitators) have or possess, but as something that is achieved and something people do. In this study, agency is conceptualised as an 'emergent phenomenon' that "should be understood as a configuration of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present" (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 626). We propose ongoing consideration of this conceptualisation of agency for application in the context of PLD facilitation practice premised upon understandings of adaptive expertise.

Implications, further research and on-going professional development support for facilitators

The implications of the present investigation highlight the need to deliberately train and induct PLD facilitators into the role, being explicit about performance expectations, not only contract delivery but in the professional practice of being a PLD facilitator, a role for which there is no formalised training. In the secondary sector, where PLD providers tend to be appointed on the basis of a record of high performance

and expertise as teachers in a learning area (and subjects), and as effective middle leaders, this includes (among many practices) deliberate training in data analysis and scoping activities to identify problems of practice, using data to inform and monitor inquiry-based approaches, including evaluative capability, and overall to shift the unconsciously adaptive facilitator who incidentally (or accidentally) is effective, to one that is metacognitive, deliberate, and reflective about their PLD decisions and actions.

Further research needs to focus on the deliberate acts of facilitators and investigate how these practices directly impact on the middle leaders they work with. A study designed to observe facilitator practices and follow-up with middle leaders to determine the short and medium term impact on their work in the department would contribute to our understandings in this field. Facilitators require on-going theoretical guidance and evidence of the practices most likely to impact on changing teacher practice. Government invests significant resources into contracting experts to design and carry out interventions in schools to improve outcomes for priority students. The evaluative capacity and research into this provision requires strengthening to ensure that the work facilitators are doing is effective and has a strong likelihood of producing favourable results.

Limitations

As with any workplace investigation, and the constraints of the PLD contract environment and Ministry's service provision requirements, there are limitations with the present study. As a scoping study in preparation for deepening understanding, and potentially measuring, effective PLD facilitation practice in subject specialist secondary school contexts, we have asked preliminary descriptive questions of facilitators about 'what' they do in their practice. Further investigation would reveal the 'why' and would delve into the metacognitive understandings of practice that we expect expert facilitators to understand and exhibit. The absence of deep evidence from this preliminary study does not necessarily mean a lack of (adaptive) facilitation expertise, more that the data collection methods did not provide opportunity for, or invite contributions related to, specific enablers.

Collecting data of actual facilitation practice is highly problematic for logistical and, at times, ethical reasons given how the addition of 'research' can potentially compromise PLD service provision if an underperforming middle leader is being asked to participate in research as well as receive PLD support. Consequently, there is a reliance on facilitator and middle leader self-report measures, rather than concrete observable evidence of practice. Proxy measures such as student achievement outcomes are not enough in isolation as there is no defensible evidence to support claims that effective facilitation practices led to changes in middle leader and teacher practices, which in turn resulted in improved student outcomes.

Ecological studies of teams of facilitators working in collaboration in schools, typical of the SSA PLD model were not considered at this time. The focus of this study was on the one-to–one individual facilitator interaction with an individual middle leader so we have not investigated facilitator practice at a collaborative across school level. The interview question in this study asked facilitators to describe one success case. Investigating the facilitation contexts that had been challenging and where little or no change in middle leadership had been evidenced was out of scope but is worthy of a follow-up study. For example, the situations encountered when middle leaders who do not have the conceptual, contextual and content knowledge of learning areas or subject required to teach students up to the highest levels of *The New Zealand Curriculum* and are unable to take a pedagogical leadership approach in their department could produce different facilitation challenges and require considerable adaptive expertise.

Conclusion

Systemic underperformance of whole school systems, senior and middle leaders, and teachers, resulting in poor outcomes for students, all in a constantly changing sector, makes the provision of PLD work perpetually challenging. Developing individual facilitators' adaptive expertise as well as collaborative practices of facilitation team members with leaders and teachers in schools, requires significant time and resources as well as an understanding of highly complex secondary school systems. Facilitators need considerable support, training and coaching themselves in order to effectively transfer from a good classroom practitioner and leader to an effective facilitator of change in schooling contexts that are often more challenging than the ones in which they are experienced.

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