'A good mentor can open up your eyes to the possibilities and opportunities that promote quality teaching and learning'

Supporting new principals as leaders of learning through mentoring

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Table of Acronyms

ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSL	Centre for School Leadership
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DL	Distributed Leadership
DE	Department of Education
DP	Deputy Principal
ETB	Educational and Training Board
ETBI	Education and Training Board of Ireland
IL	Instructional Leadership
JCT	Junior Cycle for Teachers
JMB	Joint Managerial Body
LfL	Leadership for Learning
LDS	Leadership Development Service
LAOS	Looking At Our schools
MU	Maynooth University
NAPs	Newly Appointed Principals
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance in Education
NSCE	National Council for Special Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Professional learning community
RCM	Reciprocal Causation Model
SDPI	School Development Planning Initiative
SLT	Social Learning Theory
SCLT	Social Cognitive Learning Theory
SLSS	Second Level Support Service
SSE	School Self Evaluation
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLAR	Subject Learning and Assessment Review
TCI	Teaching Council of Ireland
TL	Transformational Leadership
TLE	Teacher Leadership
WSE	Whole School Evaluation
VSS	Voluntary Secondary School

Abstract

Mentoring is an established method of support for principals as they commence their role as school leaders. However, there is limited research on the influence of mentoring on the development of leadership practices of newly appointed post-primary school principals in Ireland. As the role of a principal has evolved from a manager to a leader of learning, the role of mentoring has also evolved.

The purpose of this general qualitative study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of newly appointed principals (NAPs) in relation to the effectiveness of a formal mentoring programme. This study addresses the following overarching research question: *how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?* This inquiry led to the development of the following embedded questions linked to the overall research question: (1) What are NAPs' perspectives of mentoring following a formal mentoring programme? (2) How has participants' professional practice been influenced by their mentoring experience?

The study considers the constructs of leadership for learning (LfL) and mentoring identifying key dimensions for each concept. Social cognitive learning theory is used as a theoretical bridge between these two concepts to explore NAPs' learning experiences. Based on ten individual interviews and a focus group consisting of four participants, this study suggests that mentoring can support the development of NAPs' LfL practices. This is achieved through four significant findings from this study: (1) the establishment of supportive relationships, (2) mentoring conversations that share learning experiences, (3) linking emotional awareness to leadership and (4) commitment on the part of the mentee to the mentoring process. In addition, this study sheds light on the importance of matching the mentor with the mentee, the philosophy of learning behind LfL and mentoring and mentoring as a form of social learning. The findings have implications for current and future mentoring programmes that aim to support NAPs as leaders of learning.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1   Introduction

The increasing expectations, competition, and interest among school systems and schools worldwide about how to improve learning have made it a challenging task for school leaders. Learning is the central goal of schools, and leadership is considered crucial in developing schools that improve students' educational experiences and outcomes. (Bush, 2008a; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999). Over the past twenty years, the role of the school principal has evolved from building manager to an instructional leader, enacting more complex and demanding responsibilities, encompassing a focus on improving student learning and supporting teachers in effective teaching and learning practices (Daniëls et al., 2019; Hallinger, 2011; Murphy et al., 2007).

Addressing the balance of these roles and demands has been found to be particularly challenging for newly appointed principals (NAPs) (Bush, 2018; Zachary, 2000). The principal's role is often a lonely one, and the only people who understand the extent of principalship are other principals and mentoring is one way to ease this loneliness and isolation (Young et al., 2005). Mentoring has been identified as an effective way to enhance new principals' leadership skills (Ragins, 2016; Daresh, 2007; Young et al., 2005). When mentoring is used as professional development, there is a significant positive effect on fostering NAPs' leadership capacity (Gumus and Bellibas, 2016). Furthermore, when NAPs engage in regular feedback sessions with a mentor, they grow in their leadership skills working with teachers for instructional change and improvement in student learning (Goff et al., 2014).

This chapter is structured to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of this research. The context of this study is set out in the first section detailing the evolving role of school principals in response to increasing accountability within the Irish education system (Sugrue, 2015). Following an overview of the study's significance, the research aims and objectives are explored to comprehend the main research question and sub-questions. In conclusion, the structure of this study is outlined, detailing the focus of each chapter.

1.2   Setting the context

This section provides the reader with a brief overview of the current policy landscape for post-primary school principals in Ireland, highlighting the importance of professional development as they

face increasing autonomy and accountability in their role as school leaders (Skerrit, 2019; Lynch 2012).

The emergence of these (neoliberal) trends was evident in the early calls for accountability. Accountability was one of the key principles informing policy development in the White Paper on Education (Gov. of Ire. 1995). The paper called for more appropriate 'performance indicators' for measuring educational outcomes (Lynch, 2012). Educational policy increasingly used language of the market and key strategy documents alluded to the market language of 'customers and clients' replacing that of students and learners (Gleeson and O'Donnabháin, 2009: 30). This move towards the market has been accelerated by successive neo-liberal governments who have promoted marketism and privatisation policies throughout the public sector (Skerritt and Salokangas, 2019). The advancement of school autonomy and accountability in Ireland impacts significantly on the role of school leaders to such a degree that management responsibilities of school principals have been redefined at post-primary level. Reflecting neoliberal trends within educational policy, the task of the school principal is not just to do the job well but to show that one is doing it well, to 'sell' the school in the local education market (Lynch, 2012). There is pressure not only to produce academic results but to profile the school in 'the market'. For this study, accountability is understood as school management taking responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning through effective leadership and management.

Aligning with global trends in educational development, Ireland has, over the past two decades, instituted reforms to change inherited patterns of school life and culture. Collaboration and greater co-operation between school staffs are being encouraged (Hislop, 2015). New forms of school leadership, with an emphasis on educational leadership, are being fostered (Coolahan et al., 2017). Over recent years educational reforms have extended the post-primary school principal's work in many ways. Given the significant turnover of post-primary school principals in recent years (Kelly, 2017) combined with the concerns expressed about the low numbers of applications for the job of principal (Coolahan et al., 2017), it is more important than ever that current supports for NAPs be better researched and understood.

Before exploring the impact of these reforms on leadership practice, it is important to reflect on the types of leadership previously promoted by the Department of Education[1] (DE). Referring to the

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[1] The name and functions of the Department of Education (DE), established in 1924, have changed over the years. In 1997 it was renamed as the Department of Education and Science (DES). In 2010 it was retitled the

primary sector, Sugrue (2015:5) considers that the failure of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to articulate a clear and coherent understanding of the role of the school principal led to an accepted assumption that the school principal was not so much a leader, rather an administrator who was 'reluctant to breach the privacy of the citadel of the classroom'. This culture of individualism was evident in both the primary and post-primary sectors, as noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1991) report remarking on Irish classroom teachers' legendary autonomy. This same report called for 'significant expansion of leadership and management training' for school leaders (OECD, 1991:133). This report became the springboard for a decade of policy development and legislation formation culminating in the Education Act (1998) (Gov. of Ire. 1998), explored further in Chapter 2.

Recent reforms have fuelled this drive to reform the education landscape. The OECD (2015) reports that between 2008 and 2014, Ireland introduced 23 educational reforms. The OECD also contends that the most effective policies are designed around students' learning, building teachers' capacity and engaging all stakeholders (OECD, 2009). One such reform relates to school evaluation, which is mandatory for all schools to engage in and provides schools with considerable autonomy in identifying areas for school improvement. The current criteria against which schools engage in self-evaluation are based on *Looking at Our School, 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2016c), which has a significant impact on leadership in schools. The framework supports schools at all levels to identify areas that need development. Furthermore, the framework defines leadership in terms of 'its impact on the quality of learning' (p.7) and views school management as inseparable from school leadership. The framework contends that for schools to be led effectively, they must be managed effectively. At this point, it is important to distinguish between educational leadership and education management.

Educational leadership and educational management are central concepts in educational organisations. However, a lack of clarity has emerged over recent decades in how practitioners and researchers describe the terms (Bush, 2008). Connolly et al. (2017:504) provide some clarity noting that educational management can be viewed 'as carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in an educational institution in which others participate'. This, according to Connolly et al. (2017:505) 'is a state of mind and does not necessitate actions, though it typically and frequently does'. For example, delegating the provision of the science programme, extra-curricular

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Department of Education and Skills (DES) and in 2020 it was renamed as the Department of Education (DE). In this thesis, the correct term relating to the specific time period is used.

activities or school finances to others. All these different levels of responsibility are connected to educational systems of some kind that involve the participation of others. In contrast, educational leadership is the act of influencing others in organisational settings to achieve goals and thus necessitates actions. Influencing others requires authority which may be derived from hierarchical relationships but may also come from others. When those carrying a delegated responsibility act in relation to that responsibility, they influence and are therefore leading (Connolly, 2017:505). For this study, school leadership is viewed as the practice of leading learning with the objective of improving student learning.

For school leaders to lead and influence activities that improve student learning, it is necessary to appreciate and attain the desired effects of reform policies (Hallinger, 2011). The main challenges include an awareness of relevant legislation and a clear comprehension of policy reforms that impact school life in general. Other challenges include understanding context, demonstrating respect for school culture, and the ability to sustain relationships to develop a collaborative vision and set goals to achieve it (Hallinger and Murphy, 2013). Elaborating further, in his presentation, 'Reflections on Leadership Challenges in Irish Schools', Hislop (2015) readily admits leadership challenges are not easily addressed 'and few of the practical tasks arising from them are readily solved' (Hislop, 2015). Various strategies, methods, and approaches to facilitate student learning, such as peer teaching, observation, feedback, and professional learning communities, have been encouraged in schools (Hislop, 2015). Furthermore, recent educational reforms have influenced schools' power structure; the roles of teachers as school leaders (DES, 2018a, 2016c) including parental and student voice (Gov. of Ire. 2019) have resulted in a restructuring of the school leadership's ecology. As school principals adjust to this changing educational landscape, they face increasing accountability to demonstrate a more collaborative approach to leadership that focuses on learning skills, student-centred learning and collective learning (DES, 2015a)

The development of school leadership policy is equally fast-paced. In recent years, several studies about successful school improvement point to the need for school leadership with a strong academic focus (Hallinger, 2011; Timperley, 2011; Robinson, 2011). This emphasis on improving student outcomes highlights leadership practices that focus on improving teaching and learning often referred to in the literature as leadership for learning (LfL). Emphasising this focus on student learning, *Looking at Our School, 2016: A Quality Framework For Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2016c:7) sees leadership 'that is focused on creating and sustaining environments conducive to good learning as paramount and acknowledges that effective leadership is essential for schools to be places where

successful learning happens'. The publication of a set of standards that describes what good leadership looks like in schools have given new impetus to leadership development and has increased the workload of school leaders. Reflecting on research and recent policy initiatives LfL is the leadership model that is the focus of this research.

This emphasis on 'effective leadership' places the school principal with a high level of accountability for teacher effectiveness, student achievement and school success (Sugrue, 2015). In most countries, including Ireland, school principals begin their professional careers as teachers and progress to school leadership via a range of middle and senior management roles. However, whatever leadership experience NAPs bring to the new role, the expectations are the same as for a 30-year veteran. As the level of responsibility and accountability for principals continues to increase, professional development opportunities are crucial in helping principals meet the challenges of improving student achievement (Guskey, 2000). One such support is mentoring for NAPs. Significantly, and in relation to this study, almost all research on mentoring reports positive outcomes (Darsh, 2007; Villani, 2006; Young et al., 2005; Zachary, 2000).

Following the establishment of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) in 2015, a leadership development model was introduced in the Irish education sector to 'ensure the provision of high-quality professional development opportunities for aspiring and serving school leaders' (CSL, 2019a). As part of the suite of supports provided by the CSL, coaching and mentoring is offered to all NAPs. Coaching is offered to all DES registered school principals and can be defined as practical, goal-focused forms of one-to-one learning and behaviour change (Daresh, 2004). CSL coaching matches expert coaches from outside the education sector with principals. The idea is that the coach will focus on skills and personal development to meet the needs of the participant, as identified by the participant through self-reflection (Earley, 2020). CSL Mentoring is offered to NAPs in both primary and post-primary schools and can be defined as how an individual works with a mentor to assist that person on the career path and provide professional development and experience as needed (Clayton et al., 2013).

Both coaching and mentoring have been identified as effective tools in helping school leaders support their practice (Bush, 2008a). This study focuses on the CSL mentoring programme, as mentoring is thought to provide a variety of experiences and enhance principals' job satisfaction and leadership development (Zachary, 2000) through the sharing of professional learning experiences (Hayes, 2019; Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004).

The CSL mentoring initiative is timely as one of the most vital support strategies for NAPs is professional mentoring provided by experienced principals (Bush, 2018; Gettys et al., 2010). While mentoring of NAPs is not mandatory in Ireland, research suggests that mentoring is both beneficial and valued by NAPs who have participated in the CSL mentoring programme (Forde, 2019; Fitzpatrick Associates, 2018).

1.3   Rationale for the study

In 2008 I was appointed principal of a co-educational post-primary school. Two years later, I became principal in a large all-boys post-primary school. Following appointment to these positions, I attended induction provided by different school management bodies and in-service support offered by the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) support service. I also joined the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and attended different conferences and meetings organised to support and inform school leaders. Attending these meetings brought me into contact with other principals and allowed me to reflect on my leadership practices and the supports available to NAPs. One challenge common to many NAPs, including this author, was finding the appropriate balance between leadership practices that respond to administrative and technical responsibilities and those that focus on improving teaching and learning.

Notwithstanding the support provided by the LDS and the different management bodies, it should be acknowledged that mentoring was not an established form of professional support when I was first appointed as principal. Despite this lack of emphasis on mentoring supports, I took it upon myself to approach a school leader, whom I knew, to provide support and guidance and act as a 'sounding board' for some of my more challenging decisions. In this context, we formed an informal mentoring relationship that I found both helpful and informative. This experience formed the first influence that shaped my research question. As I commenced the doctoral programme, my initial research question was defined as '*how can mentoring support NAPs to settle into their new roles?*'

Another influence comes from my current role as a seconded team leader with the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service for post-primary schools. This role has brought me into contact with teachers and school leaders as they embed and enact significant teaching, learning, assessment and reporting changes. (DES, 2018a, 2017, 2015a). Facilitating professional development for teachers and school leaders has given me a deeper appreciation of adult learning, in particular, how social learning theory can be used to comprehend the influence of mentoring on NAPs' professional

practice. From this experience, my research question grew to include the development of leadership practices that sought to improve teaching and learning.

The next significant influence on my choice of research area was my experience in the doctoral programme in Maynooth University (MU). In particular, the class lectures, readings, and class discussions around leadership and management directed my thoughts towards school principals as leaders of learning. The focused reading I engaged with and the different essays I completed in the first two years added to my interest in this area. My research question developed to *how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?*

1.4   Definitions

Different professions develop a distinct vocabulary unique to the work of that occupation. It is not surprising that familiar language may be defined in multiple ways. The topic of leadership and mentoring are areas where neither practitioners nor researchers agree on common definitions. The following description of terms designates and defines the terminology used throughout this study. Each of these is explored further in Chapter 3, sections 3.2, 3.3.

Distributed leadership (DL). This form of leadership sees leadership as distributed among all school members. This form of leadership 'concentrates on engaging expertise 'wherever it exists within the organisation rather than seeking it through formal position or role' (Harris, 2004:13). Harris (2013) argues that successful school leaders recognise the limitations of a singular leadership approach and adopt a form of leadership that is distributed through collaboration practice.

Formal mentoring relationships. Formal mentoring relationships develop with organisational assistance or intervention, usually in the form of voluntary assignment or matching of mentors and mentees (Daresh, 2007) and 'are developed and operated within organisations' (Zachary, 2005:36). In this study, a formal mentorship refers to the CSL mentoring programme and is also called a mentoring dyad. A dyad is a singularly composed relationship between a mentor and mentee.

Instructional leadership (IL). This form of leadership can be characterised as a top-down approach to school leadership because it is mainly focused on principals and their activities that impact teaching (Aas and Brandmo, 2016). Despite its prominence and longevity, IL has been criticised on the grounds that it is focused too heavily on the principal's authority and power (Hallinger, 2011).

Responding to this criticism, Hallinger and Heck (2011) note that in the twenty-first century, IL has been reincarnated as 'leadership for learning'.

Leadership for learning (LfL). LfL is a form of leadership that is highly concerned with improving student outcomes where the focus is on learning and leading teachers' professional development (Earley, 2017). The touchstones for this leadership style include leaders' ability to stay constantly focused on learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment and make all the other dimensions of schooling work towards improved learning (Murphy et al., 2007). Southworth (2009) emphasises that LfL requires principals to be stewards of a shared vision for learning and develop learning communities focused on improving curricular, instructional and assessment programmes. LfL is understood to emphasise the focus on relationships to explicitly improve learning.

Mentee. A principal in his/her first year who has received mentoring support and guidance from an experienced professional. For this study, a mentee is a NAP who has taken part in the mentoring programme organised by the CSL during the 2018/19 academic year. All participants in this study are NAPs and mentees.

Mentor. A person dedicated to another person's developmental needs by providing support, guidance, knowledge, and skills (Daresh, 2004). For this study, mentors are experienced post-primary school principals who have completed a CSL mentor training programme.

Mentoring. Mentoring is a professional relationship between two people (a mentor and mentee) over a long-term period that endeavours to grow a mentee's professionalism (Young et al., 2005). The more experienced professional (mentor) assists and supports a less experienced person (mentee) to develop his/her skills and knowledge and enhance opportunities for professional and personal growth (Kram, 1985).

Social cognitive learning theory (SCLT). SCLT started as the social learning theory (SLT) in the 1960s by Albert Bandura. It developed into SCLT in 1986 and posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behaviour. For this study, the learning that takes place within the mentoring relationship (social context) between the mentee and mentor is called social learning. A key component of SCLT is self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1977a:3). Principals with a high sense of self-efficacy will typically out-perform those with a low sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs are an element of SCLT.

Transformational leadership (TL). This form of leadership focuses primarily on the process by which leaders seek to influence school outcomes rather than on the nature or direction of those outcomes. Higher levels of personal commitment to organisational goals and greater capacities for accomplishing these goals are assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999).

1.5   Aims and objectives of the study

This general qualitative study's primary aim is to explore how NAPs perceive mentoring as an influence on their leadership practices. Determining NAPs' perceptions of their mentoring experiences, particularly the possible benefits for their leadership practices, may help develop mentoring programmes for school leaders. Ultimately, this study explores how mentoring relationships serve as a catalyst for professional development that fosters LfL practices of NAPs. From this understanding, the objectives of this study are fourfold:

- To explore the development of NAPs' LfL practices following the completion of a formal mentoring programme.
- To identify the underlying features of mentoring that support the development of NAPs' LfL practices.
- To explore mentoring as a form of social learning.
- To formulate recommendations for the continuing implementation of mentoring programmes for school leaders.

The scope of this research can be understood through the three key concepts explored in this study: LfL, mentoring, and SCLT.

Leadership for Learning

The understanding of the main elements of school leadership has evolved over recent decades. It has encompassed a series of components such as establishing goals, promoting professional

development, developing curriculum, and improving instruction while not losing sight of crucial management issues (Urick and Bowers, 2014). However, research has shown that, rather than a disjointed concept of particular elements of school leadership, a holistic approach titled LfL, encompassing the elements mentioned above, has emerged as an influential form of school leadership (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger and Heck, 2010).

In essence, LfL describes practices that school leaders use to achieve important school outcomes, particularly student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). Several empirical results across many studies have begun to show reasonably consistent patterns of leadership impact on student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008) and today the term LfL has come to encompass features of IL, TL and DL (Boyce and Bowers, 2018; Earley, 2017). For Hallinger (2011), LfL can be understood as the reincarnation of IL, in that IL initially focused on the principal's role whereas LfL incorporates a broader range of leadership sources and additional foci for action, highlighting the importance of learning for students, teachers and staff (Fullan, 2014). LfL is often understood as the process where the whole school community participates in the improvement of learning (Marsh, 2012) and the actions of school leaders to improve learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2011). However, LfL is not without its critiques. According to Smythe and Wrigley (2013) LfL is a narrow and somewhat simplistic approach to education, while Dimmock (2012) contends that LfL focuses too heavily on learning outcomes rather than a broader and more beneficial educational experience that focuses on students' potential.

For this study, several authors' conceptualisations are explored to provide a nuanced picture of the existing literature of LfL. From this review, five core dimensions of LfL are identified, forming the leadership component for this study's theoretical framework.

The significance of LfL is magnified by the paradigm shift in post-primary education in Ireland with recent policy initiatives promoting a shared/collaborative approach to leadership (DES, 2017, 2018a), collaborative teaching and learning activities embodied in Junior Cycle reform (DES, 2015a) and SSE (DES, 2016b, 2012a). Alongside these policy initiatives, the need to provide appropriate professional development for school leaders came into the spotlight (Coolahan et al., 2017). Mentoring for NAPs is one such support provided by the CSL and is the second key concept of this study.

Mentoring

Mentoring can be a powerful tool for supporting NAPs and enhancing their learning, and effective mentoring may increase the odds of success for NAPs as leaders of learning (Gumus and Bellibas, 2016). LfL, it can be argued, has strong synergies with mentoring engagements, where the mentor works in collaboration with the mentee to collectively advance teaching and learning. As a subset of LfL, this collaborative, shared approach reflects DL that may encourage mentees to foster practices in others that inspire others in roles to achieve organisational goals (Harris, 2004). In the context of mentoring, Hudson and Hudson (2011) outline DL where the mentor takes an informal leadership role to guide the mentee in developing their leadership practices. In this respect, a successful mentoring relationship is one where the mentor promotes DL with the mentee so the mentee can build their capacity towards effective leadership practices. Cooperation and sharing of common goals has strong association with DL (Spillane and Diamond, 2016) and strong associations with mentoring relationships (Zachary, 2000).

In essence, there is a demonstrated need for principal mentoring with ongoing professional support to continue the learning and growing process (Scott, 2010; Daresh, 2007). This study explores the mentoring experiences of NAPs who have completed the CSL mentoring programme and the corresponding impact on the development of their LfL practices. To capture the key elements of mentoring, the literature review provides an overview of the theoretical perspectives of mentoring and how it relates to the professional development of NAPs. From this review, five core dimensions of mentoring are identified, forming the mentoring component for this study's theoretical framework.

Social cognitive learning theory

For this study, I employ SCLT as it helps to explain the learning process when a mentor advises a mentee. SCLT built upon Bandura's (1977b) SLT, which championed the idea that people can learn by observing the behaviour of others. Focusing on 'self-efficacy' as an integral element of SCLT, the theory serves to scaffold this study's theoretical framework connecting the dimensions of LfL and the dimensions of mentoring to answer this study's research questions. Self-efficacy is an important psychological subject in the field of education that has led educators to attentively examine its impact on an individual's performance and commitment (Crow, 2001). Feedback, the mindset of the mentee and modelling are essential aspects of learning in SCLT. For example, by observing other people and their social cues, people imitate behaviour, thus learning from modelled behaviour (Bandura, 1977a).

1.6   Research Questions

Questions surrounding how to examine various phenomenon require careful consideration. The framing of the research question(s) is crucial; it focuses, centres, shapes, steers, and drives the entire research and it is the answers to the research questions which the researcher is interested in (Cohen et al., 2018:165). The clarity of the research question for this study emerges from three sources. The first source was my own experiences as a NAP in two post-primary schools. The second was my role as a team leader with a support service to assist teachers and school leaders embedding curricular and assessment reform in their schools. The third source was my reading of the literature on school leadership theory and mentorship theory.

The combination of personal and professional reflection with conceptual and contextual considerations led to the formulation of my main research question. The research question defined and guided the process as one that is both exploratory and confirmatory. This study addresses the following overarching research question*: how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?*

My inquiry and reflection led to the development of the following embedded questions linked to the overall research question.

1.   What are the perspectives of NAPs engaging in a formal mentoring programme?
2.   How has NAPs' professional practice been influenced by their mentoring experience?

1.7   Significance of the study

This study is noteworthy for numerous reasons. First, the study develops an appreciation of professional mentoring effectiveness as a primary component of professional development for school leaders. It is widely accepted that quality professional development and learning are essential supports for principals that will enable leaders to meet the diverse responsibilities and expectations for the position (Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004). Mentoring support can mitigate the effects created by the gap between principals' responsibilities and the skills and practices required to be a successful school leader (Bush, 2018).

Recent scholars have noted the pressures facing Irish post-primary school leaders and the growing complexity and demands of the role (King and Nihill, 2019). Despite these pressures facing school leaders, there is a notable absence of principal mentoring research within the Irish context.

Moreover, from an international perspective, few scholars have engaged in empirically designed studies to specifically explore how mentoring supports the development of leadership practices of NAPs. This study attempts to address this dearth of research by generating new insights for post-primary school principals, school leadership support services, and policymakers.

This study's theoretical framework is developed to scaffold the exploration of NAPs' perspectives of their mentoring experiences. This framework provides an overview of LfL practices and an insight into the structure and process of mentoring through the lens of SCLT. As mentioned previously, the idea of mentoring is not new in educational leadership research; however, several formal mentoring studies do not engage findings from empirical research or employ theoretical frameworks (Young et al., 2005; Villani, 2006). Similarly, although the potential benefits of mentoring are evidenced in the literature, these studies tend to be anecdotal (Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004). This study's importance and originality explore NAPs' perceptions of mentoring, focusing on mentees' leadership practices.

As the CSL mentoring programme is still in its infancy as a support for school leaders, understanding the necessary supports for NAPs to persist and succeed in the role is continually evolving. Research indicates that school leaders who have engaged in formal preparation and development report an easier transition into the role than those who have not (Murphy, 2019). It is hoped that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential benefits of mentoring and the development of NAPs' practices.

1.8   Structure of the study

This study is essentially in two parts, composed of six themed chapters. Following this brief introduction, Chapter 2 (Policy and context), Chapter 3 (Literature review), and Chapter 4 (Methodology) complete the first part by establishing the rationale, context, research design, sample selection, data analysis, ethical framework and the theoretical framework for this study. The second part presents the study's findings (Chapter five), including the implications and recommendations (Chapter 6). The following section provides further detail on each of these chapters.

Chapter two

This chapter sets the context for the analysis of policy that influences post-primary education in Ireland, specifically the evolving role and responsibilities of post-primary school principals and professional development opportunities afforded to school leaders. The chapter begins with a

description of the historical development of post-primary education in Ireland. The second section charts the management of post-primary schools as realised with the 1998 Education Act (Gov. of Ire. 1998) and the 2012 Education (Amendment Act) 2012 (Gov. of Ire. 2012) and explores the role of the DE and the internal management structures of post-primary schools. This chapter also addresses school principals' changing roles and responsibilities in light of recent policy initiatives, specifically reforms that focus on increased school autonomy and DL. The final section details policy development that supports school leaders' professional development, revealing the current supports provided by the professional development support service for teachers (PDST) and the CSL.

Chapter three

Chapter three defines the three pillars that establish this study's theoretical framework: LfL, mentoring, and SCLT. The first section explores early theories of school leadership, narrowing the focus of the study to LfL. I draw from a consensus within school leadership literature, which defines LfL as the school leaders' prime function (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2008; Murphy et al., 2007). From this consensus, I establish my first pillar of the theoretical framework, an understanding of LfL encompassing five leadership practices, namely:

- Creating a vision for learning.
- Managing curricular and assessment programme.
- Building relationships and developing people.
- Fostering a positive school environment.
- Shared leadership.

The next section examines the importance of mentoring in principals' professional development, asserting that mentoring plays a key role in inducting NAPs into the profession. Early studies on mentoring were focused on skill development for mentees in acquiring managerial skills to gain confidence in managing the school (Daresh, 2007). As the role of the principal has evolved, so too has the role of mentoring in principals' professional development. Following a review of mentoring literature and several established theoretical perspectives of mentoring, the chapter presents the second pillar of the theoretical framework, the five key features of effective mentoring:

- Matching of mentor and mentee.
- Mindset of the mentee.
- Trust.

- Feedback and reflection.
- Emotional intelligence.

The third section of this chapter and the final pillar of my theoretical framework introduces SCLT (Bandura, 1986) which helps explain the learning process when a mentee is advised by his/her mentor. This section identifies SCLT as an important learning theory that can act as a theoretical bridge between the two concepts. Focusing on the influence of self-efficacy, SCLT provides a bridge to understand better the influence of mentoring and the development of LfL practices of NAPs. For an overview of the theoretical framework, refer to figure 3.9, section 3.5.

Chapter four

This chapter explores the philosophical foundations and practical considerations that inform the research design. Chapter four locates the research within the social constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. A sequential qualitative mixed-method design (Morse, 2010) is used to gather data utilising semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The chapter details the approach taken to analyse the data, providing a detailed overview of reflective thematic analysis and the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Preliminary themes/dominant narratives were identified following an initial analysis of the individual interviews. These preliminary themes and prevailing views were used to inform the schedule of questions for the focus group to further explore answers to the research question. Other practical issues are explored, including sampling, selection of participants and the ethical considerations and protocols which underpinned the research design.

Chapter five

The second part of this study begins with an overview of the findings. Findings are organised under four themes and subthemes presented simultaneously from the two data collection stages. These themes align with the social constructivist/interpretivist paradigm of this study and are situated against the theoretical framework for discussion purposes. The research themes are:

- Supportive relationships.
- Sharing learning experiences.
- Emotional awareness.
- Mentee motivation.

Chapter six

The final chapter draws conclusions from the process and addresses the research question. This chapter presents six key insights that address the main findings. Each insight represents an area of knowledge considered essential for supporting the development of NAPs' LfL practices through mentoring. In answering the research question, I synthesise the themes from the literature with phases of the research process to suggest precise recommendations and improvements to existing mentoring programmes, including programme organisers, participants and policymakers. In conclusion, recommendations for future research are suggested.

1.9   Conclusion

School leadership is increasingly being recognised as central to the development of a quality education in many countries (Bush, 2018). However, the job of leading a school can be overwhelming, and in order to be successful, principals need significant support (Young et al., 2005).

Although the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) for school leaders has been firmly established in Ireland (Murphy, 2020; Coolahan et al., 2017), there is a further challenge in establishing a direct link between quality CPD for NAPs and improved teaching and learning. Guskey (2000) makes the point that although leadership development alone may not be sufficient to bring about significant improvement in education, a well-structured professional development component is at the core of every successful educational improvement plan.

This chapter outlined the motivation for this study, presenting a brief overview of the context and the evolving role of the post-primary school principal in Ireland. This was followed with an exploration of the aims, objectives and significance of this research. Next, the three key concepts of LfL, mentoring and SCLT were introduced, providing the rationale for the research questions and structure of the thesis.

The following chapter sets the context for the analysis of policy that influences the work of the principal and post-primary education in Ireland.

Chapter 2
National and Policy Context

2.1   Introduction

This chapter sets the context for the analysis of policy that influences post-primary education in Ireland, specifically the evolving roles and responsibilities for the school principal and professional development opportunities afforded to school leaders. This is achieved by setting out the broad context of post-primary education in Ireland against the backdrop of policy development and implementation.

The importance of school leadership as a concept in Ireland has evolved considerably. It is significant that there is no mention of the principal in Coolahan's (1981) seminal volume of the history of the Irish education system. However, over recent years, the context of educational policy has changed, establishing a drive towards strengthening school leadership and promoting professionalism (DES, 2011, 2019). The analysis of policies to write this chapter reveals a story of little contestation between the central ideas that give emphasis to the importance of school leadership and professional development for school leaders. Significant aspects of this story include the lack of legislative policy governing the operation and management of post-primary schools up to the 1990s (Gleeson, 2010), the 'rising tide' of accountability (Conway and Murphy, 2013), an understanding of leadership as a shared/collaborative practice (Hislop, 2015), and the importance of school self-evaluation (SSE).

Reflective of these themes, this chapter is structured into four main sections providing the reader with a brief overview of the historical, political and economic influences on policy development. Each section provides the reader with deeper insights into the role of the post-primary school principal in Ireland and the challenges and opportunities facing NAPs. Section one provides a brief outline of the historical development of post-primary education, including the types of post-primary schools in Ireland. Section two explores the legislative framework, the role of the DE, and schools' internal management structures. Section three articulates the implications of growing neoliberal trends through the impact of recent policy initiatives that focus on developing school autonomy and DL. Finally, section four details policy developments that support professional development for school leaders focusing on supports provided by PDST and CSL.

2.2 Historical development of post-primary schools in Ireland

This section considers the historical complex tapestry that is Irish education and the development and types of post-primary schools operating in Ireland today.

The genesis of the Irish education system has been described as 'unusual, complex and interesting' (Coolahan, 1981:141). The history of the patronage and management of Irish post-primary schools can be found in the interaction of various post-colonial, religious, and political issues. Perhaps in a reaction to the fact that the schools were once used as an *instrumentum regni* [2] by the colonial occupier (Coolahan, 1981:140), the Catholic Church became the primary provider and manager of post-primary education in Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Different religious congregations established themselves as central to the development of the Irish education system, particularly with regard to land, investment in school buildings and staff – both managing and teaching (O'Donoghue and Harford, 2011). Religious run post-primary schools were pivotal to developing a cohesive, progressive education system in an otherwise poor and underdeveloped country (Coolahan, 1981). This historical legacy gave 'unparalleled ownership, access and local control to the Church while the burden of the financial and central administration was carried out by the State' (Gleeson, 2010:25). The issue of church ownership of schools has resulted in high levels of local autonomy with respect to many elements of schools' governance (MacRuairc, 2010).

During the 1970s, and the flourishing of the State-run education system, an emerging consensus saw that the most appropriate way of accommodating growing diversity in Ireland's population, particularly in towns and cities, was through a variety of school types enhancing parental choice for schools appropriate to parental convictions (Griffin, 2018). The growth in the post-primary population over the following decades and growing secularisation in Irish society has reinforced this consensus.

Today, there are three types of post-primary schools in Ireland: voluntary secondary schools, vocational and community colleges, and community and comprehensive schools, each of which are described below.

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[2] Instrumentum regni (literally, **'instrument of monarchy'**, therefore 'of government') is a Latin term used to express the exploitation of religion by State or ecclesiastical polity as a means of controlling the masses, or in particular to achieve political and mundane ends.

Voluntary secondary schools

Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed. They are under the trusteeship of religious communities, boards of governors or individuals and include religious run schools, private schools and Educate Together schools. The national organisation representing the boards of management of these schools is the Joint Managerial Body (JMB).

Vocational and community colleges

Vocational schools and community colleges are run by the local Education and Training Board (ETB). The boards of management for these schools are sub-committees of the ETB. Membership of the boards includes ETB representatives and parent, teacher and community representatives.

Community and comprehensive schools

Community and comprehensive schools were established in the 1960s to provide a broad curriculum for all the young people in a community. Many of these schools were established as a result of the amalgamation of voluntary secondary and vocational schools. They are managed by boards of management that are representative of local interests. The representative body for these schools is the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS).

The most recent post-primary statistics (academic year 2019/20) show the DE provided aid to 723 post-primary schools (DE, 2020). The following table (table 2.1) gives a breakdown of the number and type of post-primary schools in Ireland, including the associated management body.

Table 2.1   Post-primary schools in Ireland

School type	Voluntary Secondary Schools	ETB and Community Colleges	Community and Comprehensive Schools
Management body	JMB	ETB	ACCS
Number of schools	378	248	96

(DE, 2020)

2.3   Management and operation of post-primary schools

This section provides an overview of the legislative framework for post-primary schools, a brief insight into the role of the DE and its agencies in supporting school leaders and the internal management structures of post-primary schools.

Historically, Ireland has been described as the 'land of saints and scholars' (Ní Silleabháin, 2016). However, since the creation of the State in 1921, there has been a distinct lack of legislation governing policy and practice in Irish schools (Sugrue, 2016). This changed with the introduction of the Education Act of 1998 (Gov. of Ire. 1998), detailing and outlining stakeholders' roles and responsibilities, including that of school leaders. The Act provides the key legislative framework for post-primary schools in Ireland.

The absolute responsibility for the governance of post-primary schools, apart from the ETB sector, is delegated to the schools' voluntary boards of management. Under the legislative structure of the Act, the board of management may devolve its power to the school principal. As such, the school principal is responsible for the school's day-to-day running and is explicitly tasked with providing leadership to teachers, students, and all who work in the school (Part IV Section 23). Under the Act, a school's board of management serves a three-year term of office. A principal is appointed in a permanent capacity and typically acts as a link from one board to the next.

The Education (Amendment) Act 2012 (Gov. of Ire. 2012) provides a more expansive outline of the principal's role with responsibility for the guidance and direction of the teachers and other staff of the school. He/she is also accountable to the board of the school for that management, to provide leadership to teachers and other staff and the students of the school, be responsible for the creation in the school of an environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers. The principal also sets objectives for the school and monitors the achievement of those objectives and encourages the involvement of parents of students in the school in the education of their children and in the achievement of the objectives of the school (Part VI Section 23, 24). This legislative framework places the principal with overall responsibility for the school's internal organisation, including assigning roles and responsibilities to members of the teaching and non-teaching staff. As a result of his/her pivotal decision-making role, the principal makes many decisions that affect the entire school community. Ongoing legislation governing policy and practice has resulted in a fluid legislative landscape for post-primary schools.

Over the past two decades, numerous acts of parliament have cumulatively influenced the work of school principals, ranging from child protection issues to middle management structures, and while some of these acts are non-educational, they all impact the work of the school principal. Legislation

has placed an unprecedented range of responsibilities on the school principal, many of which are only secondarily connected to the quality of teaching and learning in the school (Hogan and Malone, 2014). It is evident that the role of the post-primary principal has become more complex with the numerous legislative acts which regulate the day-to-day work of a school principal. Table 2.2 provides an overview of some of the acts of parliament that impact the work of the school principal.

Table 2.2   Acts of parliament that impact the work of the school principal

Education (Admissions to Schools) Act 2018
Data Protection Act 2018
Technological Universities Act 2018
Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2015
Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2015
The Children First Act 2015
The Protected Disclosures Act 2014
Further Education and Training Act 2013
Education and Training Boards Act 2013
Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012
Education (Amendment) Act 2012
Student Support Act 2011
Residential Institutions Redress (Amendment) Act 2011
Education (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2007
Teaching Council (Amendment) Act 2006
Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
Employment Equality Act 2004
Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004
Ombudsman for Children Act 2002
Teaching Council Act 2001
Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001
Youth Work Act 2001
Educational Welfare Act 2000
Equal Status Act 2000-2015

Source DES website https://www.education.ie/en/The-Education-System/Legislation/

Education legislation is centralised with the DE 'exercising a great deal of direct and indirect control over most aspects of the system' (Coolahan, 2011:144), arguably resulting in a level of prescription and conformity that puts increased pressure on leadership practices within and across schools. However, post-primary schools in Ireland have a considerable degree of autonomy regarding their governance, ownership, management and organisation. For example, the Education Act (1998) provides for a school management system and a patronage system that emphasises local control of schooling. Further, in all post-primary schools, the school's stated ethos (that is, the values and principles it promotes) is decided by the school's owners or patrons/trustees and not by central government (DES, 2015c).

Department of Education

In addition to the legislative framework, the DE publishes regulatory directives in the form of department circulars to enact and clarify policy. While not all circulars relate to the post-primary school principal's work, the majority directly impact his/her work. On average, the DE issue up to 70 circulars each year. Although some of these circulars relate to administrative functions outside the sphere of influence of the school principal (such as salary scales and further and higher education) the majority have a direct impact on the role of the school principal. In 2012, for example, the *Framework for Junior Cycle* was introduced only to be updated in 2015 and consequently revised by annual department circulars, the most recent by circular 76/2020 (DE, 2020b).

The DE provide support in the form of action plans, strategies, and different initiatives that merge to provide a framework of guidance to schools. These DE supports cover areas such as effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and enriching the quality of leadership (DES, 2016c), school self-evaluation (DES, 2016b, 2012a), embedding curricular reform (2015a, 2012b), and legal responsibilities and other areas that influence the effective operation of schools. Also, within the DE, the inspectorate has responsibility for evaluating post-primary schools. Inspectors provide advice on a range of educational issues to school communities, policymakers, and the broader educational system. Working in tandem and under the aegis of the DE, other agencies provide guidance and support, including the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the Teaching Council of Ireland (TCI). Provision of DE supports does not necessarily reduce responsibilities for school principals; instead, it can create new duties by, for example, DE circulars and policy documents that require enactment at local school level and decisions to consider. High workloads and the need to be available for staff, students, and parents

can lead to fragmentation of the workday for principals (Darmody and Smith, 2016), particularly for NAPs as they navigate their new educational landscape.

Internal management structures in schools

In relation to internal school management, school principals work alongside a deputy principal(s) who is appointed based on student numbers; schools with over 400 registered students are entitled to one deputy principal post, schools over 700 and 900 students are entitled to two, and three deputy principal posts respectively (DES, 2018a). Middle management positions consist of Level 1 (Assistant Principal I) and Level 2 (Assistant Principal II) posts, distinguished by the level of pay and associated responsibilities and again are dependent on the number of registered students.

Assistant principals occupy positions of strategic importance in the leadership, management, and administration of the school. Assistant principals work in teams in collaboration with the principal and/or DP(s) and have shared responsibility in areas such as:

- Curriculum and learning.
- Student support and wellbeing.
- School improvement.
- Leadership management and development of staff teams (DES, 2018a).

Schools also have flexibility in identifying and prioritising their evolving leadership and management needs, including assigning and reassigning post holders to specific roles and responsibilities to meet these needs (DES, 2018a).

2.4   Recent policy initiatives

This section provides an overview of recent policy reforms that impact the work of the post-primary school principal. This is accomplished by exploring the socio-political context that seeded much of the educational reform and by focusing on specific reforms that impact the work of post-primary principals, specifically, school autonomy (DES, 2015a) and DL (DES, 2016c).

The national political disappointment following Ireland's 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results, combined with the post-Celtic Tiger economic downturn, gave way to a period of significant educational reform (Murphy, 2019) reflecting neoliberal tends of autonomy and accountability. From this neoliberal lens, educational reform was viewed as a way out of the

recession (Quinn, 2012). Such a focus on connecting the education system with the economy has resulted in increased importance placed on how students perform in international comparisons studies such as PISA (Skerrit, 2019). Furthermore, several authors have acknowledged the use of the language of the market in Irish education in recent years (see, for example, Skerritt and Salokangas, 2019; Lynch, 2012; Gleeson and O'Donnabháin, 2009; Surgrue, 2009). Following an analysis of policy documents from the year 2000, Mooney Simmie (2012:506) contends that 'the changing tune of neoliberalism being played' has changed over recent years from 'soft to medium to loud'. Policy text evidenced a focus on education as economic output with literacy and numeracy skills seen as essential for rebuilding economic prosperity (DES, 2011:15). With education viewed primarily from an economic perspective (Ball, 2016), the economic turndown following the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, coupled with the growing influence of the OECD and PISA, has meant that neoliberalism marketisation principles of competition, choice, autonomy and self-steering have become the preferred options in the Irish education system (Mooney Simmie, et al., 2016). Supporting Conway and Murphy (2013) this study views increased accountability and autonomy through a neoliberal lens where the 'rising tide' of accountability and increased scrutiny of the school principal's role has increased significantly in recent years (MacRuairc, 2012, 2010; McNamara and O'Hara, 2012). The notion of autonomy within this increasingly constrained accountability framework has contributed to a very specific workplace reality for school leaders (MacRuairc, 2012). The following section considers how growing school autonomy impacts the role of school leaders.

School autonomy

Reflecting the body of research emphasising the positive influence of school autonomy (Eurydice, 2007; OECD, 2005) the *Programme for Government 2011-2016* (Gov. of Ire. 2011) envisaged changes that promote greater school autonomy, including increased control over staffing, budget, school infrastructure and curricular developments (DES, 2015c:9). The rationale for pursuing a school autonomy approach has been articulated as one which aims to ensure better value for money and create competition between schools which, in turn, will lead to enhanced student performance (Skerritt, 2019; MacRuairc, 2010). The cumulative impact of this drive towards increased school autonomy has brought accountability to the fore of school leadership and is evidenced in the *Action Plan for Education* (DES, 2016a), forming the blueprint for policy development. The plan refers to numerous targets relating to performance, efficiency, flexibility, and transparency, reflecting the continued movement towards neoliberalism and increased accountability and performativity, where schools are answerable for the quality of education they provide. Within this context, numerous policy initiatives emerged, responding to the vision of ensuring that the Irish education system

became the 'best in Europe' (DES, 2016a:1). However, a growing body of international and Irish research portrays a different view of increased school autonomy (Keddie et al., 2020; Skerrit, 2019; Heffernan, 2018), pointing towards its less than positive influence on schools. For example, Hargreaves (2016:123) argues that school autonomy is not always a good thing and can work against notions of LfL as it tends to lead to 'principals turning into de-professionalised performance managers and evaluators of teachers as individuals rather than builders of professional communities amongst all their staff within and across schools'. Despite such arguments, it is evident that increased school autonomy is core to educational policy in Ireland.

Over recent years numerous policy initiatives have sought to establish increased school autonomy to realise the vision of making the Irish educational system one where individuals can 'achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development' (DES, 2019). The view here is that in order to improve the quality of education systems, schools function better if they are both autonomous and accountable. This vision is evidenced by the drive towards curricular reform such as *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and for Life 2011-2020* (DES, 2011), the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2015a, 2012b) and *Senior Cycle reform* (NCCA, 2019). These policy reforms place the school principal as the key driver who creates and sustains learning environments that are conducive to good learning (DES, 2016c).

Arguably, the most significant reforms over recent years that extend school autonomy relate to curriculum and assessment practices. Furthermore, advanced school autonomy appeals to those who advocate for curricular reform, arguing that the Irish educational system is too academically oriented and focused on those progressing to third-level education (Skerrit, 2019). From this perspective, autonomy can be seen providing opportunities for students to realise their potential beyond the academic, summative, high-stakes examinations, such as the 'Leaving Certificate'. In this regard, the *Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020, Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment* (DES, 2015b) promotes students being exposed to new forms of learning and collaboration that support their different learning styles where school management provides 'leadership and takes ownership of the challenge' to achieve information communication technology (ICT) integration (DES, 2015b:7). Parallel with the Digital Strategy, the DES published the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2012b, 2015a) that focuses on students' experiences from first to third year in lower post-primary school. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2015a) replaces the Junior Certificate programme previously criticised for being overly reliant on rote learning and memorisation technique. The new Junior Cycle highlights the integration of innovative approaches to teaching and

assessment with the goal of improving students' overall educational experience. The Junior Cycle framework allows schools to develop their own autonomy in planning, content design, evaluation and reporting. Alongside this developing teaching and learning culture, schools now have the ability to plan educational programmes for their students that combine elements of the new curriculum with other learning experiences as part of students' learning path (DES, 2016a, 2015a). Recent changes to resource allocation for special educational needs (SEN) in managing and deploying additional teaching support within schools (DES, 2018b, 2017b) emphasise this policy drive towards increased school autonomy.

This policy trajectory towards school autonomy is closely aligned to the need to ensure that schools are accountable for the quality of education they provide (King and Nihill, 2019). These reforms, taken together, highlight the increasing level of accountability placed on school principals' shoulders to provide leadership that focuses 'on creating and sustaining environments conducive to good learning…' (DES, 2016a:7). This increasing burden on the school principal has resulted in additional workload and pressures on leadership practices and has arguably led to the increased focus DL within schools.

Distributed leadership

A fundamental tenet of educational policy reform in Ireland is the convergence of school leadership with school self-evaluation (SSE) (Murphy, 2019), reflecting the DL model (DES, 2018a). SSE (DES, 2012a; 2016b) requires schools to continually focus on implementing change and improving learning outcomes. SSE operates alongside *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2016c), which provides a set of standards for two dimensions of schools' work – teaching and learning and leadership and management. The publication of a set of standards that describes what good leadership looks like (leadership and management dimension) in post-primary schools provides clarity and a shared language to enact change that supports school improvement (appendix 6). For 'effective and highly effective practice', schools are viewed as learning organisations empowered to enact leadership roles that are linked to the effective use of DL models (Murphy, 2019). As perceived in the Irish policy context, the post-primary school principal's role reflects the global paradigm shift where leadership is seen as a shared and collective endeavour (OECD, 2013). Specifically, the document highlights and explains competencies and practices (called 'domains' in the framework) required to deliver the desired learner outcomes and experiences for pupils. The framework calls for school leaders to be competent in four domains:

- Leading teaching and learning.

- Managing the organisation.

- Leading school development.

- Developing school leadership (DES, 2016c)

The DE conceptualize this document as the framework against which the SSE process for school improvement is implemented.

Other significant reforms reflecting the focus on DL concern new leadership and management structure in schools. Circular letter 0003/2018 on the leadership and management of post-primary schools (DES, 2018a) notes the central role school leaders play in determining a school's improvement trajectory and ensuring its success. Whereas previous circulars in this area tended to place posts of responsibility in the management sphere (DES, 2002), this circular identifies 'high-quality leadership as crucial in establishing a shared purpose and vision for the school and to the achievement of high-quality educational outcomes for students' (DES, 2018a:1). However, despite the increasing drive towards DL both in policy and rhetoric, there is little engagement with what this means for school leadership and whether it genuinely represents shared leadership espoused by Spillane and Diamond (2016). This presents an ongoing challenge for school leaders to make visible and explicit the concept of DL. Moreover, there is limited evidence about the success of DL initiatives or other related efforts to spread leadership to teachers (O'Donovan, 2015; Hartley, 2009). This contested field of DL is addressed further in section 3.2.2.

In summary, recent policy initiatives provide increased possibilities for extending the autonomy of schools regarding curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment and have significant implications for school principals' leadership practices. For King and Nihill (2019), the challenge for school leaders is to contextualise learning in their school by looking at the direction of curriculum and instruction in various ways, including engaging students meaningfully and making them active participants in their learning. School principals' development as leaders of learning will be crucial to stimulating the curriculum, pedagogical and assessment autonomy that post-primary schools currently have and may have in the future. These reforms impact school principals' leadership practice because they are expected to ensure the enactment of these new policies adhering to DL practices. Hence, this policy drive towards increased school autonomy and DL necessitates that NAPs access practical and useful professional development opportunities that support them as leaders of professional learning whilst providing them with and an understanding of DL perspectives in schools.

2.5   **Supports and professional development for school leaders**

This section explores past and existing professional development opportunities for aspiring and current school leaders, providing an overview of these supports focusing on CSL and specifically the mentoring programme for NAPs.

Background and context

In 1991, an OECD report noted that 'no one concerned with Irish education disputed that the amount of in-service education and training available was grossly inadequate' (OECD, 1991:129). From a leadership perspective 'a significant expansion of leadership and management training would be required…if schools were to be able to respond to the assumption of greater autonomy...and greater responsibility for their own affairs' (p.133). However, until the mid-1990s, educational leadership was not regarded as a priority in Irish educational policy (Coolahan et al., 2017).

In Ireland, leadership policy has evolved as part of the overall changes and ongoing reflection in the education system. Following the enactment of the 1998 Education Act (Gov. of Ire. 1998), the school principal's role came into focus, and the corresponding need to develop supports for school leaders grew in impetus. The turn of the century saw the arrival of support services under DES supervision, such as the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and Leadership Development for Schools (LDS). The primary policy responses to support school leaders were centred on the work of LDS. Several LDS programmes were provided for school leaders focusing on developing leadership capacity in schools, induction for NAPs and support for established principals in different contexts and schools (LDS, 2007). Economic constraints saw the LDS subsumed into the PDST support service in 2010. Today, school leaders can avail of elective supports from different support services. The largest single support service in Ireland is the PDST, which currently offers, among others, the following support for school leaders.

- *Misneach* is a two-year personal and professional development programme for NAPs. The word 'Misneach' derives from the old Irish word for courage, spirit and fortitude. The *Misneach* programme seeks to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and qualities of NAPs, empowering them to respond effectively to the realities of managing and leading in the Irish school context.

- *Tánaiste* aims to support deputy principals over the course of their first year as senior school leaders. The *Tánaiste* programme consists of five separate events spread over the course of

14 months, during which participants explore a broad range of topics related to both the day-to-day management and the strategic leadership of their schools.

- *Forbairt* is a one-year programme for experienced school leaders.

Currently, there is no mandatory leadership qualification required for promotion to the position of principal or deputy principal. Despite this, an increasing number of supports are in place through the higher education sector for aspiring and current school leaders. Over recent years, a growing number of higher education courses in educational leadership are available in Ireland. Table 2.3 provides a list of current available programmes.

Table 2.3   **Overview of higher education programmes in educational leadership**

Institution	Programme
University College Dublin (UCD)	Professional Diploma in Education Leadership/ Masters in Education (Leadership)
University College Cork (UCC)	Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Leadership
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	Masters in Education: Leadership and Management in Education
Maynooth University (MU)	Masters in Education (Educational Leadership) Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management (Future Leaders) Masters in Educational Leadership and Management
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick (MIC)	Masters in Educational Leadership and Management
University of Limerick (UL), National University of Galway, (UCD)	Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership

Fitzpatrick Associates (2018), CSL (2018)

Wider supports

The establishment of the NAPD in May 1997 was intended to unify different organisations that were representing principals and deputies at the time. The NAPD seeks to provide a voice for school leaders as one of the education partners. The NAPD also organises regional and national meetings that typically incorporate discussion of current issues for school leaders and training components. Supports are also provided to NAPs across the different post-primary sectors through its national executive, a network of regional meetings, and local and national conferences and symposia (NAPD, 2020). The NAPD also provides a range of formal and informal training, professional development

and support throughout the year. The three management bodies, the ETBI, the JMB and the ACCS offer induction programmes to NAPs in their respective sectors on appointment. Typically, these programmes are offered in June and/or August before taking up appointment and at different times during the first year. Although NAPs generally attend the management bodies' induction, there are no formally mandated training courses for school principals or deputy principals.

Policy developments supporting professional development for school leaders
Alongside the wider supports provided to school leaders, over recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the need for ongoing professional learning for school leadership (DES, 2018a) and a re-focus on the school leader's role in leading learning and teaching (DES, 2016c). As part of the drive to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people, the *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and for Life 2011-2020* (DES, 2011) identified the need for focused professional development for school leaders on effective approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy (p.41). More recently, the *Action Plan for Education 2016 – 2019* (DES, 2016a) includes numerous targets relating to performance with a specific focus on 'strengthening leadership and embedding innovation as an integral leadership skill' (DES, 2018b:38).

The importance of professional development is core to the ethos of the TCI as the professional standards body for the teaching profession, which promotes and regulates professional standards in teaching. The TCI's *Strategic Plan for 2015-17* (TCI, 2015) includes the establishment of a national framework for professional development called *Cosán* (Irish word for pathway). The *Cosán* framework encourages and supports teachers in their ongoing professional learning, acknowledging that all teachers are leaders of their own learning and professional development. (TCI, 2016:4).

Another significant development was the establishment of the CSL in 2016. The CSL's primary focus can be summarised as the drive for the ongoing construction and facilitation of a system-wide developmental continuum for school leaders (Murphy, 2020).

Centre for School Leadership
Before it was subsumed into the PDST in 2010, the LDS had been researching the role of coaching and mentoring to develop leadership skills, as these approaches had not been applied in school leadership development models in Ireland up to that point (Gov. of Ire, 2020:14). In 2014, the DES assembled a working group to coordinate and develop learning opportunities for school leaders. Based on research and consultation, the CSL was established in 2015 to develop a coordinated and

coherent continuum of professional development for school leaders. This continuum has included the development and national rollout of coaching and mentoring opportunities (CSL, 2017a), a pilot scheme designed to support projects that involve innovative approaches to school leadership and management (leadership clusters), and the development and provision of a post-graduate diploma in school leadership with universities across Ireland (CSL, 2020a). In its pilot handbook for providers (CSL, 2017b), the CSL articulates a vision for quality assurance which seeks to promote high quality learning at each point on the learning continuum. It aims to ensure cohesive and consistent practices across all leadership development programmes and a coherent adherence to *Looking at our School, 2016-2020 - A Quality Framework for Schools* (DES, 2016c) in order to ensure that programmes are relevant, well designed and of high quality*.*

The establishment of the CSL was a recognition of school leaders' vital role in today's policy-driven climate, ensuring the provision of high-quality professional development opportunities for aspiring and serving school leaders (CSL, 2019a). Partly funded for participants by the DE, the mentoring initiative reflect the growing global interest and concern about school leadership and preparation and development (Bush, 2018).

CSL mentoring

CSL organises formal mentoring support for all NAPs as part of the PDST *Misneach* programme. However, CSL is not directly involved in the mentoring programme's delivery, except for training mentors to support newly appointed school leaders as part of the *Misneach* programme. To take part in *Misneach,* NAPs complete a PDST/CSL designed common application form where NAPs can provide information about their professional context. To provide participants with an overview of the mentoring process, the CSL facilitates a module with two sections on mentoring for *Misneach* participants. The first section explores the rationale for mentoring, including the qualities and skills of mentoring. The second section covers the rules and protocols of the mentoring relationship. Mentoring relationships normally begin in September and end in June the following year.

Since 2018, the CSL utilises software to assist the matching process between the experienced school leader (mentor) and the NAP (mentee). This software matches principals according to the criteria of distance and context, which are then checked manually. Mentors and mentees also sign a mentor/mentee agreement before the commencement of the process. During the 2018/2019 school year, there were 60 post-primary mentoring relationships (CSL, 2019b), with 70 mentoring relationships established during the 19/20 school year (CSL, 2020b). At the end of the mentoring

process, the CSL provides details of mentees to the NAPD so that they may organise group mentoring sessions for principals in their second year of principalship.

2.6   Conclusion

Over recent years in Ireland, the context of educational policy illustrates a drive towards school autonomy, DL, strengthening leadership, and promoting professionalism (DES, 2019:32). This chapter has established the most significant policy developments as they impact (a) the changing role and responsibilities of post-primary principals and (b) the evolution of professional development opportunities for school leaders.

This chapter situates educational leadership in the broader context of recent educational policy reform in Ireland. Over recent years, the growing interest in school leadership is evidenced in national policies, management changes at school level, and professional development provision for school leaders (Coolahan et al., 2017). More generally, two dominant discourses are evident from this review of recent policy initiatives: reforms that define 'school leadership in terms of its impact on learning' (DES, 2016c:7) and the provision of a range of systematic supports intended to enhance the professional learning of school leaders, in particular the establishment of the CSL.

The current educational landscape for post-primary schools is a fluid one. A review of legislation and recent educational policy reforms shows the cumulative impact on school principals' work as they endeavour to create the conditions where individuals 'can achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, economic and cultural development' (DES, 2019). The absence of compulsory, focused leadership CPD for school leaders in Ireland means that leadership supports for NAPs continues to be extensive. NAPs can avail of various leadership professional development inputs provided by the PDST, CSL, NAPD and management bodies; however, the variety of supports can make the landscape of provision a rather messy one to navigate. The establishment of a mentoring programme as a joint enterprise between the PDST and CSL brings a level of coherency and argues well for current and future professional development of NAPs.

This brief review of the current policy landscape suggests that the learning experiences of NAPs are crucial to their successful transition to school leadership and their provision of effective leadership that supports the creation of environments where 'successful learning happens' (DES, 2016c:7). The next chapter reviews the literature, exploring the key tenets of educational leadership, mentoring and SCLT.

Chapter 3
Literature review

3.1   Introduction

A literature review is a focused and detailed evaluation of the available published materials to provide a comprehensive picture of the knowledge relating to the topic (Creswell, 2014). For this study, I explore how mentoring can influence the development of NAPs' leadership practice. The literature review was crucial because it determined the extant knowledge/understanding and identified a gap in the literature that this study addresses by gathering empirical data.

As this study explores three aspects of educational leadership, this chapter is divided into three main sections. The chapter begins with an overview of leadership, reflecting on different traditions of leadership, leading to a definition of leadership in education. This is followed by a summary of the most referenced leadership models evident in the literature, namely IL, TL and DL (Hallinger and Kovačević, 2019; Gumus et al., 2018). The reader is then introduced to LfL through the lens of IL as LfL can be considered a 'reincarnation' of IL (Hallinger, 2011). Next, the literature is examined to identify different leadership models and frameworks that are viewed as LfL approaches. To conclude this section, the reader is provided with a synthesised critical perspective of the key dimensions of LfL as evidenced in the literature.

The second section explores how mentoring can support NAPs' professional practice. Following an overview of mentoring as professional development for school leaders, different theoretical perspectives of mentoring are presented. Constructed around the theoretical perspectives of mentoring and mentoring literature, five key features of mentoring are identified and presented as the dimensions of mentoring.

Next, Bandura's (1986) SCLT is presented as a theoretical frame to (a) explore mentoring as a form of social learning for NAPs and (b) act as a bridge between the dimensions of LfL and the dimensions of mentoring. Focusing on the importance of self-efficacy, SCLT emphasises the importance of observing and modelling the behaviour, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. To conclude, the theoretical framework draws on LfL, mentoring and SCLT literature and is presented as the underlying structure to explore the research question: h*ow can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?*

3.2   Leadership in education

Leadership in education invites much attention from scholars, mostly because of growing responsibility for school principals and the accountability-driven context they work in (Sugrue, 2016). This growing accountability-driven context stems from the growth of neoliberalism, drawing attention towards performativity and accountability agendas in educational reform. For example, Ball (2016:12) considers the influence of neoliberalism on educational policy in Ireland, concluding that performativity and accountability agendas radically undermine educators' professionalism 'in the hunt for measures, targets, benchmarks, tests, tables, and audits to feed the system in the name of improvement'. According to Courtney (2015:214-215) the 'discursive dominance of neoliberalism' and 'market-driven solutions' to educational problems has fostered the development of corporatized leadership in England with the establishment of business-driven leadership practices and identities. Acknowledging the increasing influence of neoliberalism on educational policy and leadership practice across the globe (Ball, 2016), this section explores specific leadership theories that have underpinned theory and practice over recent decades.

Summarising the evolution of these leadership theories provides an understanding of past practices that shape our current understanding of LfL. To begin this discussion, the following paragraphs (a) explore the challenge of defining leadership (Yukl, 2002) and (b) locate this study within the different fields of knowledge within educational leadership (Gunter, 2016).

3:2:1   Defining leadership in education

Defining leadership in education is a difficult task as there is no agreed definition available in the literature (Gumus et al., 2018; Bush, 2008a). Seeing the bigger picture in the field of leadership in education is a challenge for the seasoned and the novice researcher. The field has developed over time and there are regional varieties across the globe. Hence, scholars have defined leadership in education in different ways over recent decades. One can argue that there may be grounds to question the merits of the term as a catch-all for the field when one considers the different traditions and country contexts. For example, O'Reilly and Reed (2010), exploring managerialism in public service reform in the United Kingdom, identify 'leaderism' as an emerging set of discourses and practices re-orientating public services (including school leadership) towards the consumer-citizen. The notion of pedagogical leadership is prevalent in other states such as Germany, where the principal is considered 'primus inter pares'[3] amongst teachers tasked with the role of making sure the school (continues) to evolve(s) (Tulowitzki, 2015:48). In Ireland, leadership is defined by the DE

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[3] Primus inter pares can be translated as 'a first amongst equals'

in 'terms of its impact on student learning' (DES, 2016c), transforming the role of school leaders from managerial and administrative tasks towards activities that improve the quality of learning in the school (King and Nihill, 2019).

Gunter (2004) shows that the labels used to define this field have changed from 'educational administration' to 'educational management' and, more recently, to 'educational leadership'. Other scholars discuss whether such changes are merely semantic or represent significant changes in the nature of the field (Bush, 2008b). However, the assumption shared by most definitions is that leadership involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure activities and relationships in the organisation (Yukl, 2002:3).

What emerges from most definitions of educational leadership is that the particular focus on education's core process and goals is teaching and learning and student achievement (Seashore, 2015; Day et al., 2009; Robinson et al., 2008; Murphy et al., 2007). Bush and Glover (2003:31) propose the following definition of leadership:

> Leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs and leading to a 'vision' for the school. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to gain the commitment of staff and stakeholders to the dream of a better future for the school, its students and stakeholders.

Emphasising the importance of shared goals, Leithwood and Riehl (2005:14) identify leadership as the work 'of mobilising and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals'. Similarly, Daniëls et al. (2019:111) describe school leadership in education as a process of influencing teachers, students and parents, leading to an effective learning climate where all stakeholders experience added value. For this study, I offer a working definition of leadership in education. This definition takes a cue from Fullan (2014:65-66) who contends that 'if principals directly influence how teachers learn together…they will maximise their impact on student learning'. I propose the following definition of leadership in education:

> Leadership in education is where principals articulate the aims and moral purpose of education through a shared vision and manage to combine and understand the school's

teaching and learning needs by nurturing a learning community that supports and improves student learning.

Following from this definition of school leadership, it is helpful to locate this research within the different fields of knowledge of educational leadership. Gunter (2016), using a multilevel framework to describe the history in terms of 'knowledge production' identifies five knowledge traditions: experiential, positivist, behaviourist, values and critical. These traditions are the intellectual resources that structure the field and are available for field actors to act and shape practice (Gunter, 2016:4). This study draws on the values and critical science traditions. The values tradition is evident where the emphasis is focused on fundamental educational values such as 'openness, toleration, speculation and interconnectedness' (Gunter, 2016:54). The critical science tradition embodies the desire to understand and explain what is going on in the reform of schools (Gunter, 2016:53).

Next, we turn our attention to leadership theories that have underpinned theory and practice over recent decades.

3.2.2   Early theories of leadership in education

To comprehend the evolution of LfL, is it essential to acknowledge that the development of school leadership aligned with theory development has encouraged new approaches to leadership and led to established leadership models being further developed and redefined (Bush and Glover, 2014). Acknowledging this growth in school leadership research, Gumus et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of various studies on leadership models from 1980 to 2014 and concluded that the most studied leadership models include IL, TL and DL. Empirical interest in these models has significantly increased over recent years (Leithwood et al., 2019). These alternatives and competing leadership models can also be viewed as the early theories of school leadership (Daniëls et al., 2019). When understanding LfL, it is essential to understand these early leadership models as LfL reflects a wide range of leadership sources, which contrasts with leadership centred around one specific model. The following paragraphs provide general information on the development and the content of these leadership models and conclude with a synthesis of the main components of these models to better comprehend the emergence of LFL**.**

Instructional leadership (IL)

Bush (2015) notes that IL emerged in the United States (US) as evidence accumulated that leadership could positively influence student learning outcomes. This idea of principals becoming directly

involved in teaching and learning came from research carried out in the 1970s following a concerted effort to comprehend the characteristics of effective schools. In this context, the school principal was considered one of the most important components of effective schools, placing heavy emphasis on the IL role. This, in turn, led to the emergence of the IL concept. Two central figures who developed this view were Hallinger and Murphy (1985) who progressed their IL model following an examination of ten elementary school principals in the US and a review of school effectiveness literature. Their analysis constructed a framework of IL with three precise dimensions and eleven job descriptions. The three dimensions identified in this model were:

1. Defining the school mission.
2. Managing the instructional programme.
3. Promoting a positive school culture (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985).

Elaborating further, the school mission is defined in terms of framing and communicating clear goals. The instructional programme is viewed in terms of supervising, evaluating, planning the curriculum and monitoring students' progress (Day et al., 2016). The last dimension, promoting a positive school culture, is explained as the principal protecting teaching time, encouraging professional development, enforcing high academic standards, and providing incentives for students (Hallinger and Murphy, 1985). Traditionally, IL models (Murphy, 1990; Hallinger and Murphy, 1985) have focused on the principal and other school leaders' roles but not the individuals at different levels with different purviews over instruction (Daniëls et al., 2019). It can be characterised as a top-down approach to school leadership because it mainly focuses on the principal and his/her tasks in coordinating and controlling instruction (Aas and Brandmo, 2016). Despite its durability, IL has been criticised on two specific grounds. First, it is perceived as being authoritarian and reliant on obedient followers (Marks and Printy, 2003). The second criticism is that it is concerned primarily with teaching rather than learning (Smythe and Wrigley, 2013).

Despite its initial prominence, IL's influence began to wane somewhat with increased attention on other emerging leadership models and a growing number of scholars expressing the view that IL and how to bring it into practice was vague (Bush, 2011a). However, according to Hallinger (2013) IL remains key to leadership theory because it focuses on schools' core process: teaching and learning quality.

Transformational leadership (TL)

The concept of TL emerged in the 1980s and stresses that leaders should motivate followers. It also incorporates several leadership practices and behaviours that facilitate organisational change (Gumus et al., 2016). It is an approach to school leadership that focuses primarily on the process by which leaders seek to influence school outcomes rather than on the nature of those outcomes (Bush and Glover, 2014). Principals who are transformative leaders are able to identify and articulate a school vision, motivate others by example, support a culture of intellectual conversation, and provide support and development to teachers (Day et al., 2016; Gunter, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008). Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) develop a comprehensive transformational school leadership model based on six leadership dimensions and four management dimensions. These leadership dimensions are:

1. Building school vision and goals.
2. Providing intellectual stimulation.
3. Offering individualised support.
4. Symbolising professional practices and values.
5. Demonstrating high-performance expectations.
6. Developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999).

The management dimensions are:

1. Staffing.
2. Instructional support.
3. Monitoring school activities.
4. Community focus (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999).

Additionally, Marks and Printy (2003) stress that TL motivates teachers and students by raising their consciousness about the organisational goals. TL contrasts with IL as it is described as a shared leadership model and aims to create change through bottom-up actions (Aas and Brandmo, 2016). Hence, TL focuses on collaboration between school leaders, teachers, students and parents. TL by school leaders has been associated with positive outcomes such as school improvements in the school environment and in relations between teachers and students (Bush and Glover, 2014).

However, TL has been criticised as a vehicle for control over teachers, requiring adherence to the leader's values, and more likely to be accepted by the leader than the led (Chirichello, 1999). Also, while TL stresses the importance of shared values, Bush and Glover (2014:8) suggest that some critics of this approach argue that 'the decisive values are often those of the government and of the principal, who may be acting on behalf of the government'. Furthermore, Bottery (2004:17) contends that 'there is much to question' in assessing TL, arguing that it transforms reality and may be more a heroic than a shared leadership model.

Distributed leadership (DL)

During the late 1980s, a new awareness of a shared/distributed approach to leadership was emerging. Leadership models adjusted towards collaboration and organisational learning (Daniëls et al., 2019). The interest in and support for DL is predicated on the assumption that it will bring about beneficial effects that would not occur with singular leadership. DL recognises that leadership can be distributed among all school members (Leithwood et al., 2008). Harris (2004:16) argues that 'successful heads recognise the limitations of a singular leadership approach' and adopt a form of leadership 'distributed through collaborative and joint working'. Acknowledging the lack of an accepted definition of DL, Spillane (2006:16) contends that DL is extended over a number of individuals and tasks are accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders. In this context, multiple individuals share the leadership responsibilities to guide and complete leadership tasks that vary in size, complexity and scope (Harris and De Flaminis, 2016). This implies that different individuals can be in charge at different times, depending on the specific challenge and the specific context. Heck and Hallinger (2010) provide a useful overview of the key tenets of DL, suggesting that the impact of DL is achieved through:

1. Improved communication of the school vision.
2. Better use of resources and structures to support students.
3. Professional learning among staff.
4. The ability to keep a focus on improving teaching and learning.

However, challenges present when the existing authority structure in a school provides a potential barrier to the successful implementation of DL. For example, Law (2010) argues that DL can lead to the power relations between leaders and followers becoming blurred. Similar concerns are expressed by Lumby (2013, 2019) who links DL to authority, claiming that insufficient attention is given to the implications of the former for power relations in schools. Timperley (2005:417) warns

that DL can be a risky business and may result in 'the distribution of incompetence'. Furthermore, Hartley (2009:202) contends that 'distributed leadership admits some confusion: its conceptual elasticity is considerable'.

Despite these reservations and the limited evidence about the success of DL to spread leadership to teachers (O'Donovan, 2015; Hartley, 2009), several scholars suggest that DL has the potential to expand the scope of leadership, leading to enhanced student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2019; Spillane, 2006).

In the preceding paragraphs, an overview of early leadership theories was presented. Before more recent leadership theories are explored, a summary of the main components of IL, TL, and DL is provided in figure 3:1.

Figure: 3:1   Synthesis of the main components of early leadership theories
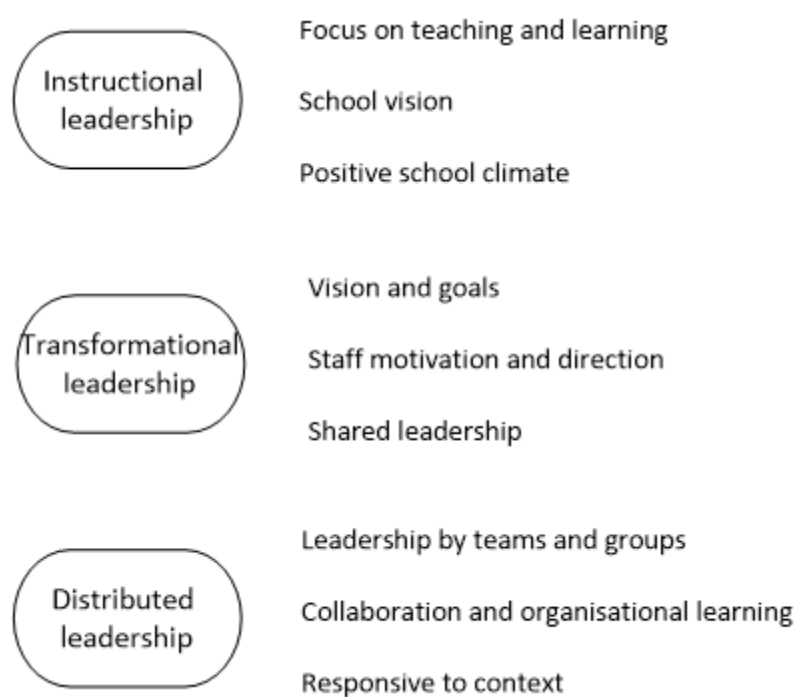
3.2.3   Emergent leadership theories: the reconceptualization of instructional leadership

Scholars often investigate school leadership from the narrow perspective of a single theory itself or solely from the point of the principal (Daniëls et al., 2019). Responding to the perceived weakness of enacting leadership theories in isolation, Marks and Printy (2003) suggest that school performance and student achievement are meaningful when IL is integrated with TL and DL. Similarly, Robinson et

al. (2008) note that successful school leadership coexists with a focus on IL, because instruction as a specific practice is lacking in other general leadership theories, such as TL. Therefore, it is beneficial to extend IL with other leadership theories to gain a deeper insight into the school leadership practices that can improve student learning (Gurr, 2019).

Acknowledging that school principals are held accountable for their students' learning outcomes, combined with the many tasks they need to fulfil, suggests that leadership must be shared or, at the very least, seen as a collective activity (Leithwood et al., 2008). The emergence of this collaborative orientation of school leadership has brought IL into the realm of shared leadership. Scholars began to extend IL with other leadership theories to get a deeper insight into school leadership's impact on student outcomes (Neumerski, 2013; Bush, 2003; Marks and Printy, 2003). Whilst this establishes shared leadership engagement, where stakeholders have a role in developing effective leadership within the school context, it also brought about a reconceptualization of IL, replacing its hierarchical nature with a shared leadership approach (Hallinger and Heck, 2011; Hallinger, 2011). This reconceptualization of IL led to the emergence of LfL in school leadership research (Day and Sammons, 2016; Gumus and Bellibas, 2016).

The emergence of LfL over recent decades reflects the rise of the concept of 'learning' and the subsequent decline of the concept of 'education' (Biesta, 2016; 2005). For Biesta (2005), teaching has been redefined as supporting or facilitating learning, just as education is often described as providing learning opportunities or learning experiences (2005:55). He argues that learning has lost much of its educational focus and is nowhere near as emancipatory as imagined. He continues that one of the main tensions with the language of 'learning' is that it allows a reconceptualization of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction. From this perspective, the learner is the customer, the teacher is the provider, and education itself a commodity to be provided by the teacher and ultimately consumed by the learner. Biesta (2005:60) strikes a note of caution using the language of learning in that it facilities an economic understanding of the process of education, and it makes it difficult to raise essential questions about the content and purpose of education, other than what the 'consumer' or the 'market' wants.

However, Biesta (2004; 2016) contends that the emergence of the new language of learning is not all bad, suggesting that new theories of learning have 'definitely has a positive effect on educational practice' (2004:64). For example, the post-modern critique of modern education has effectively exposed authoritarian educational structures and practices.

This study responds to the growing interest in the new language of learning that has attracted much attention from education scholars (Dimmock, 2012; Hallinger and Heck, 2011; MacBeath, 2008). Emphasis on teaching and learning over recent decades and the acknowledgement of DL has brought attention towards leadership that is focused on learning. One can argue that 'learning' is certainly a term whose time has come and therefore presents a greater reason for its nature and purpose to be carefully considered (Earley, 2017). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, LfL is a key concept and this term is used throughout the study. As one of the key concepts of this study, the following section focuses on the growing scholarly attention towards LfL.

3.2.4   Leadership for learning

Over recent years the theory of LfL has emerged in school leadership research (Gurr, 2019; Marsh, 2015). In broad terms, LfL is an approach to leadership 'whereby the leader helps foster a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for students. Elements include principal leadership, clear mission, teaching expectations, and opportunities to learn' (Osborne-Lampkin et al., 2015:2). LfL describes approaches that school leaders use to achieve important school outcomes, in particular student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Murphy et al., 2008). Southworth (2009) has contributed significantly to the debate about LfL and suggests strategies such as modelling, monitoring, and dialogue to enhance teaching and learning. For Southworth (2009:101), school leadership is about 'the simultaneous use of these strategies in ways which mutually reinforce one another'. It is their combined effect that creates powerful learning for teachers and leaders, which, in turn, informs teachers' actions in classrooms and leads to improved teaching and student learning.

This conceptualisation of LfL as a whole-school community activity also draws on evidence that increasingly suggests that leadership is a relational process that is reciprocal, collaborative and empowering for all parties (Robertson and Timperley, 2011:8). In this respect, Fullan (2014) identifies the role of school principals as promoting collective ownership rather than individual attention. He asserts that school principals, as the 'leading learner', will maximise their impact on student learning if they can directly influence how teachers learn together. He contends that:

> it is not that they affect very many teachers one by one, but that they work with
> other leaders in the school and together affect teachers more in groups than they do
> individually (Fullan, 2014:64-65).

While collaborative leadership attracts much interest, Spillane (2006) contends that it does not make redundant the role of the school principal. Rather, by exhibiting characteristics such as fairness, compassion, commitment, hard work, trustworthiness and professionalism, school principals can remain key drivers for change and a source for building the capacity of others (Hallinger and Heck, 2011).

As with establishing a collaborative understanding of leadership, LfL emphasises the importance of establishing a shared sense of meaning and purpose in regard to the school's direction (Aas and Brandmo, 2016). LfL is also results-orientated with an explicit focus on student achievement (Hallinger, 2011) with the aim to impact school performance through a sustained schoolwide focus on learning (Murphy et al., 2007).

We can glean from this discussion that LfL focuses on the centrality of teaching and learning and that leaders' influence on student outcomes is via staff, especially teachers (Swaffield and MacBeath, 2009). From this brief overview of LfL, it is evident that 'learning' is a term that is central to educational leadership. In this respect, it is appropriate that careful consideration is given to the nature of learning with LfL and the possible challenges and tensions therein for school leaders.

Challenges and tensions

In education systems that operate within a high stakes accountability culture, there is a danger that learning becomes very narrowly defined and the overall goal of education is lost. As Earley (2017:167) notes, 'it is easy in a time of measurement, targets and league tables to lose sight of what the primary purpose of schools should be'. To comprehend this new language, Biesta coined the term 'learnification', which he views as the emergence of the new language of learning on education. This emergence is seen in what he refers to as discursive shifts where all students and adults are referred to as learners, teachers as facilitators of learning and creators of learning opportunities (Biesta, 2016:80). Moreover, Smythe and Wrigley (2013:156) suggest that the term 'leading learning' has been reduced to monitoring attainment. At the same time, Dimmock (2012:46) strikes a note of caution, suggesting that discussions about learning-centred leadership are meaningless where 'government policy priorities are measured by league tables and inspection regimes' that are unresponsive to local contexts resulting in 'little scope for much else'.

Another tension relates to the DL component of LfL where the existing authority structure in schools provides a potential barrier to the successful implementation of collaborative leadership. There are inherent threats to status and the status quo in all that DL implies (Harris, 2004:20). Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008) refer to this enduring consequence of authority and note the darker side of DL, calling it 'managerialism' in a new guise. Harris (2004) outlines some additional difficulties. Recognising the structural and cultural barriers that operate within schools, she suggests that it could make it very difficult for some teachers to show leadership. Seeking power positions in a school can create a climate where, for example, a newly appointed teacher may decide not to express his/her opinion, especially if it differs from the dominant discourse. Such action could be perceived as a threat to the status quo.

Also, LfL may present tensions in relation to the level of instructional leadership on instructional evaluation and supervision and even whether this is realistic in the context of some schools. For Horng and Loeb (2010), the principal's involvement in the classroom has only a marginal impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Hallinger (2011) notes that even principals who are determined to be more heavily involved in classrooms meet numerous and varied challenges. The ever-increasing pressure of exam results, accountability, curriculum reforms and limited resources all challenge the extent to which the LfL concept can be practised and adopted (MacBeath et al., 2018; Earley, 2017).

According to Earley (2017:168) the challenge for school leaders is to enact LfL so that it is more than just about academic achievement, and leadership and learning is more than exam results, testing and meeting policy objectives. For MacBeath (2018:44) school leaders who enact LfL need to constantly reflect on the purpose of their actions, ensuring the creation of a school environment where teachers can teach (and learn) effectively, and students can learn. The argument here is that LfL can empower staff and students to reach their potential where student outcomes can be improved beyond the narrow focus of academic attainment (Smythe and Wrigley, 2013).
To provide further clarity to our understanding of LfL, we now turn our attention to established models of LfL that have a central concern to improve teaching and learning and incorporate a broad range of ideas about how to do it.

3.2.5   Models of leadership for learning

Supporting Marsh (2015), LfL seems to incorporate a wide spectrum of leadership actions to support learning and learning outcomes. This section explores three LfL models that provide scholars and

practitioners with a theoretical lens to engage with LfL. The first comes from Murphy et al. (2007) who examine the components for LfL employing research on highly productive schools and high-performing principals. The second comes from Swaffield and MacBeath (2009), who develop their model from a grounded empirical project that connects leadership and learning. The final model is from Hallinger (2011) and the expansion of his earlier view of IL.

Murphy et al. (2007)

One of the most widely referenced models of LfL is provided by Murphy et al. (2007), who contend that LfL is evident in high performing schools. They sum up the essence of LfL concepts when they said the touchstones for this type of leadership include 'the ability of leaders to (a) stay consistently focused on the right stuff—the core technology of schools, or learning, teaching, curriculum and assessment, and (b) to make all the other dimensions of schooling (e.g., administration, organisation, finance) work in the service of a more robust core technology and improved student learning' (2007:179). This leadership model comprehends LfL under eight dimensions:

1. Vision for learning.
2. Instructional programme.
3. Curricular programme.
4. Assessment programme.
5. Communities of learning.
6. Resource acquisition and use.
7. Organisational culture.
8. Social advocacy (Murphy et al., 2007:182).

Murphy et al. (2007) contend that the principal must work in collaboration with stakeholders to establish the vision and learning goals for the school and then ensure that staff members are in the best roles to maximise their own knowledge and skills, as well as ensure that the necessary resources are available to implement the vision. This practice brief highlights the roles that principals must assume within their school communities to improve students' academic success. Moreover, effective school leaders need to run the school through a collaborative or shared lens (Murphy et al., 2007). Through their practice of shared leadership, effective principals encourage collaboration among staff and a sense of school community:

Effective school leaders are especially skilful in creating learning organisations and fostering the development of communities of learning. They are vigorous promoters of professional development, they nurture the growth of communities of professional practice, and they shape school organisations to adhere to the principles of community (Murphy et al., 2007:187).

However, when we drill down and compare this LfL model with the IL model provided by Hallinger and Murphy (1985) (section 3.2.2) there seems to be little to separate them. For example, 'Vision for learning' can be viewed as the school's mission; the instructional program, curricular program, and assessment program can be considered under 'managing the instructional program'; communities of learning, organizational culture, and advocacy together can be viewed as promoting a positive school learning climate. Hence, as Townsend et al. (2013) note that the only substantial difference between these two models is resource acquisition and use. Thus, we can conclude that this well-popularised model of LfL is not too dissimilar from the IL model of Hallinger and Murphy (1985).

Swaffield and MacBeath (2009)
A developing understanding of LfL is highlighted by Swaffield and MacBeath (2009) grounded in the outcomes of the Cambridge University 'Leadership for Learning Project' (2002-2005)[4]. However, Swaffield and MacBeath (2009:34) suggest that LfL is 'not as an additional model of leadership competing for attention with a plethora of alternatives but as qualitatively different from other models'. This LfL approach focuses on the improvement of students' learning outcomes rather than the traditional approach that focuses on making educational resources available to students. It can be viewed as an outcomes-focused model for education, where the needs of students come first in learning. This model considers that teachers' leadership education, through mentoring, will prioritise, improve and fulfil students' learning needs. However, leaders need to communicate with educators, staff, families, and students. Relationship building is essential.

This model reframes LfL as 'activities' through which people with moral purpose exert agency influencing and servicing others with a focus on learning. As illustrated in figure 3.2, LfL principles in this model provide a set of common framing principles observed in the seven participating countries in the project. These are shown in the diagram's outer frame and is a reminder that all leadership in education stems from a moral purpose. At the base of the model, leadership and learning are bookended by activity and agency to emphasise that 'leading and learning are necessary forms of

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[4] The International Leadership for Learning (Carpe Vitam) Project (2002-2005) explored the relationship between leadership and learning across 24 different schools and policy contexts.

activity, enacted by those with a strong sense of their own human agency' (MacBeath et al., 2018:42). The three interconnecting tiers provide a visual reminder that learning and leadership are present at every level of the educational community, flowing in all directions 'the shared province of students, teachers, senior managers, and communities of learners' (p.42).

Figure 3.2   Leadership for learning – an integrative model

Swaffield and MacBeath, (2009)

The LfL model views leadership as an activity that anyone can exercise, and learning applies to all. All engaged participants are guided by the five principles at the top of the model:

1. Focusing on learning.
2. Sharing leadership.
3. Engaging in dialogue.
4. Sharing accountability.
5. Creating favourable learning conditions.

Swaffield and MacBeath (2009) contend that such practice requires shared and accountable leadership, where supportive learning environments are created, and teachers are given every opportunity to grow and explore new ideas in the classroom. Leadership is not merely found at the

apex of an organisation but at different levels and in different places. It includes teachers and students and should be a shared and collaborative process.

Hallinger (2011)

Hallinger (2011) advances a more detailed and repurposed leadership model built upon his earlier IL model and labelled as LfL. In this model, leadership action comes from the principal and others in the school where individuals/groups could have multiple roles and responsibilities in their work. This model provides a wide-angle lens for viewing leadership's contribution to school improvement and student learning. Hallinger (2011) presents four LfL dimensions subsumed within this model of LfL. They include values of leadership, leadership focus, context for leadership and sources of leadership. The dimension 'leadership focus' highlights three main avenues or paths through which leadership is linked with learning. These are:

1. Vision and goals.
2. Academic structures and processes.
3. People capacity (Hallinger, 2011:127).

Hallinger (2011) contends that leadership influences these elements that, in turn, influence student outcomes. The school principal brings his/her professional experiences, beliefs and knowledge to his/her leadership role. Furthermore, Hallinger (2011) suggests that leadership operates within a complex environment that encapsulates all contextual influences, including societal culture, an institutional system, staff and community characteristics. He proposes that effective LfL is adaptive and responsive to the changing conditions of the school over time. However, the persistent focus is on improving the conditions for learning and creating coherence in values and actions across classrooms, day in and day out in the school (Hallinger, 2011:137). Hallinger (2011) suggests that school leaders can have a significant impact on the teaching and learning culture of a school by enacting the following approaches:

1. Building the school's capacity for improvement.
2. Taking time to understand the context first, then develop suitable leadership strategies.
3. Sharing leadership and empower others (Hallinger, 2011:137-138).

Summary

These models have brought a freshness and originality to leadership discourse exploring how we come to understand the connections between leadership and learning. However, as mentioned previously, scholars and practitioners have widely employed the term LfL but not always understood it as incorporating the same leadership practices. For example, Hallinger (2011) claims that LfL and IL are essentially the same thing, a simple matter of terminology. However, MacBeath (2020) suggests that this ignores the 'latent power of words...that makes it virtually impossible to recast the concepts that shape our thoughts'. Expanding on this point, Dempster (2019:418) considers that LfL has surpassed IL in that the former is about the moral purpose of education focused on 'listening to people whose interest should be served by 'engaging people in shared initiatives that override hierarchy ...emphasising the educational task as lying beyond instruction, management, school and classroom'**.**

The emergence of LfL places the focus on the core business of what schools do and identify leadership practices that bring this about. The literature on LfL combined with the associated models and frameworks allows us to identify common LfL practices. Taken together, these studies provide important insights into LfL, suggesting that the actions of school leaders are crucial for creating and maintaining the conditions and environment where teachers can teach (and learn) effectively and students can learn (Earley, 2017:169). This study refers to these common LfL practices as key dimensions of LfL and are explored in the next section.

3.2.6   Dimensions of leadership for learning

Placing LfL within the growing corpus of leadership literature, it is not uncommon to find the terms IL and LfL often used interchangeably, referring to an understanding of a set of responsibilities that rest on the school principal's shoulders (Dimmock and Tan, 2016; 2010). Furthermore, research indicates that many studies have begun to show consistent patterns of impact on student learning, where today the term LfL has come to subsume features of IL, TL and DL. Boyce and Bowers (2018) argue that the literature regarding LfL can be viewed as a counterpart to IL, reaffirming the assertion by Murphy et al. (2007) and Hallinger (2011) that leadership practices of IL and LfL are strongly interconnected. Supporting Bush and Glover (2014), this view also suggests that effective school leaders should incorporate elements from other leadership types, including IL, TL and DL. The parallels between different frameworks and models of LfL (Hallinger, 2011, Southworth, 2009; Swaffield and MacBeath, 2009; Murphy et al., 2007) and previous theories of school leadership (IL, TL, and DL) (section 3.2.2), highlight several leadership practices that support LfL. This analysis

provides a conceptualization of LfL encompassing this author's distillation of the key dimensions bespoke for this research project.

The key LfL dimensions are:

1. Creating a vision for learning.
2. Managing the curricular and assessment programme.
3. Building relationships and developing people.
4. Fostering a positive school environment.
5. Shared leadership.

Constructed around the key concepts of IL, TL, DL and LfL literature, figure 3.3 illustrates the relationship between previous leadership theories and the key dimensions of LfL.

Figure 3.3   Relationship between IL, TL, DL and the key dimensions of LfL.
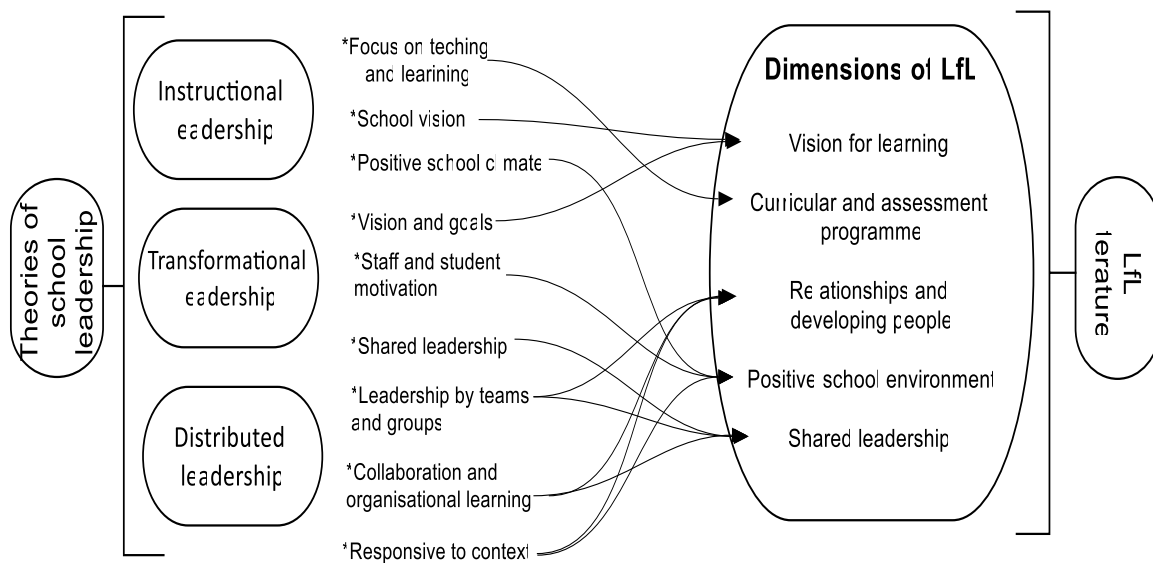
This figure is based on Boyce and Bowers (2018), Hallinger (2011, 2003, 1985), Southworth (2009), Swaffield and MacBeath (2009), Robinson et al. (2008), Muijis and Harris (2007), Murphy et al. (2007), Spillane (2006, 2004).

The main components of educational theories are shown on the left, illustrating how each component relates to the dimensions of LfL. The key dimensions of LfL represent the five most recurrent features to emerge from the literature and, as such, form the lens from which LfL practices

are considered in this study. The following section elaborates further on each of these LfL dimensions.

Creating the vision for learning

The ability to articulate a learning-focused vision that is shared by others and has clear goals creates a base for all other leadership strategies and actions (Hallinger, 2011). Dwyer (1985) conducted research 35 years ago and concluded visions that were written down on paper only come alive through actions that are enacted on a daily basis. Today, it is an accepted narrative in leadership discourse that a school's vision forms the base for the goals and objectives of that particular school (Robinson et al., 2008). Bush (2015:34), agreeing with Leithwood et al.'s (2008), asserts that successful school leadership includes the notion of vision as the practice of enhancing 'motivation and inspiration for the work of staff' as an essential dimension of the schools' future. Furthermore, Leithwood et al. (2008) highlight the need for leaders to be visionaries if they are to guide others. Similarly, Murphy et al. (2007) place considerable responsibility on the principal to communicate the vision by setting the example and high expectations for teaching and learning as shared goals in the school community. Hallinger (2011) contends that these goals have to be supported and incorporated into daily life by the staff where the principal should communicate the school goals to teachers, students and parents through the formal communication channels within the school such as the school handbook and assemblies or informal ones such as parent-teacher meetings.

It is also clear that the formulation of the school vision necessitates engaging the opinions of staff and the local community (Reitzug et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2008). This exchange of opinions and ideas with various stakeholders allows for meaningful reflection and feedback in a collaborative space (Hallinger, 2011). According to Reitzug et al. (2008), school leaders must facilitate this engagement while at the same time ensuring school policies continually reflect the vision of the school. Furthermore, the principal should espouse the school's vision and expectations for the success of all students and demonstrate them in his or her own behaviour (Murphy, 2007; Marks and Printy, 2003). As Murphy et al. (2007:73) describe:

> Effective principals and other school-based leaders articulate the vision through personal modelling and by communicating with others in and around the organisation…They demonstrate through their actions the organisation's commitment to the values and beliefs at the heart of the mission as well as to the specific activities needed to reach goals.

A key feature of the vision revolves around the core structure and organisation of the school experience for students and teachers, that of the curricular and assessment programme.

Managing the curricular and assessment programme

An important factor in determining school leaders' effectiveness is the capacity to support and enhance teaching practice (Bowers et al., 2017; Levin, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). The research evidence identifies curriculum management as a set of practices whereby principals provide pedagogical support and guidance to teachers (Robinson et al., 2009). Managing and coordinating curriculum and assessment is arguably one of the fundamental roles of a principal who is a leader of learning (Hallinger and Murphy 2013; Townsend et al., 2013). Previous studies have explored the relationship between curricular and assessment practices and school leadership. For example, Robinson et al.'s (2008:662) study reveal that teachers in higher-performing schools report that 'their leaders are actively involved in collegial discussions of instructional matters'. Likewise, Rhodes and Brundrett (2010:156) claim that senior leaders need to help teachers – who are leaders of teaching and learning in classrooms – 'to improve their own practices by enabling teachers to continue to learn themselves'.

A summary of this pedagogical support is provided by Southworth (2009:102), who has made several suggestions of how systems and structures can support learning-centred leadership. These include planning processes, target setting, communication systems, classroom observation and providing feedback to teachers. Identifying school principals as learning-centred leaders, Seashore (2015) asserts that principals who focus on learning cultivate what she calls 'professional community'. In this context, school leaders act in precise ways: they ask questions that provoke teachers to think; they give 'power' over curriculum priorities and school practices to teachers, and they ensure that all students have equal opportunity to have the best teachers (p.102). Hallinger (2011) underpins the importance of aligning the curriculum with supervision of teaching and learning, suggesting that school leaders need to stimulate, supervise, and monitor teaching and learning in schools.

Hallinger (2011) draws attention to the school context and personal considerations as a significant influence on curricular and assessment programmes. The practical task facing a new principal in a new school setting involves 'appreciating the school's context and the improvement trajectory and culture, including how staff think, act, and respond to different situations' (Hallinger, 2011:15). Similarly, acknowledging different school cultures, Reitzug et al. (2008) state that some principals, depending on their context, prefer to monitor lesson plans and implement formal curricula as a

means of ensuring teachers perform, while other principals use school support teams to monitor and report on the teaching and learning processes. Recognising the workload of principals, Southworth (2009) argues that principals, at the very least, must have a minimum adequate knowledge of curriculum issues. Fullan (2014:41-42) puts it succinctly, suggesting that 'principals need to be specifically involved in instruction so that they are knowledgeable about its nature and importance, but if they try to run the show down to the last detail, it will have a very brief run on Broadway indeed'.

Acknowledging the leading role principals play in providing pedagogical support and guidance to teachers, an increasing body of research is emerging in regard to the critical role played by principals in shaping and influencing how data and other forms of evidence are used in schools (Hallinger and Murphy, 2013; Levin, 2010; Southworth, 2009; Murphy et al., 2007). The use of a variety of data and research can inform school improvement in relation to how teachers and students are performing. It can identify schools' weaknesses and strengths and inform decisions about where best to locate resources (DES, 2016b; Fullan, 2016). Principals' use of data can enhance teachers' understanding of students' learning progress and support curriculum and assessment improvements that improve student outcomes (Levin, 2010).

Supporting and enhancing teaching and learning is underpinned by the school leader's ability to build relationships and develop people. This dimension of LfL is the focus of the next section.

Building relationships and developing people

LfL can be understood to explicitly emphasise the focus on relationships to improve learning (Bowers et al., 2017). Furthermore, Marsh (2012) identifies LfL as a community engagement encompassing holistic activity that is not confined to senior leadership. The idea of leadership here is understood as relational and is enhanced by numerous interactions where individuals and teams challenge and support each other to ignite conversations about student learning (MacBeath et al., 2018). This emphasis on relationships within the context of LfL is widely acknowledged in the literature (Hallinger, 2011; Boyce and Bowers, 2018; Fullan, 2014). Themes that relate to collaboration, trust and shared teaching practice are identified as areas that either contribute to or support relationships (Marsh, 2012). These social conditions are alluded to by Seashore (2015:14), who argues that staff encounters in a school are crucial and are grounded in 'the stimulating relationships that they have with other teachers that create effective individual and collective learning environments that support change'. For Robinson (2017:4) experienced school leaders know how to

build relationships; what they find far more difficult is building and maintaining relationships of trust while addressing the difficult issues that are central to leading improvement. Her research suggests that school leaders significantly affect whether or not supportive and challenging work environments exist. One way to build relationships is to create a culture of support for teachers that can be translated into support for student learning (Murphy et al., 2007).

In their 2010 report on school leadership, Barber et al. (2010) sought school principals' opinions on the three most essential skills required of a school leader. Interestingly, all respondents selected 'ability to coach others and help them develop' among their top three most important leadership skills. This skill is a good indicator of LfL as teacher development is the most impactful practice on student learning outcome (Barber et al., 2010). The study suggests that principals from high performing schools dedicated more of their working hours towards teacher development than a comparison group of randomly selected principals (p.7). These findings align with Murphy et al. (2007:191) who suggest that senior leaders are the 'catalysts for in-school based efforts at continuous improvement who understand and communicate that complacency is the enemy of improvement, that the status quo is more tightly linked to decline than growth'.

Also, Robinson (2011) convincingly demonstrates how leadership relating directly to teacher development has the most significant impact on student outcomes. Identifying five factors that underpin effective leadership, Robinson (2011) suggests that promoting and participating in teacher learning and development positively influences student outcomes. Crucial here is leaders' knowledge of the types of professional development that are more likely to impact the students of the participating teachers. The key message is clear: 'The more leaders focus their relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes' (Robinson et al., 2009:201).

For Robinson (2011), leading teacher learning and development has the biggest 'effect size' on increased student learning; however, she contends that creating a safe and secure environment for students and staff is the foundation for all endeavours to improve student learning.

Fostering a positive school environment
According to Hallinger (2011) the school environment influences people's behaviour and distinguishes the organisation from other organisations. In clarifying the learning culture of a school, trust and collaboration are identified as important elements central to the practice of LfL (Marsh,

2015). Furthermore, Daniëls et al. (2019) and Opengart and Bierema (2015) suggest that mutual trust between teachers and school management contributes to improved student outcomes.

Hallinger (2011), referring to leadership practices that influence the school environment, considers that the practice of intentionally listening to teachers results in improved relationships between the principal and teachers. In exploring a school organisation's learning culture, collaboration, trust, and excellent communication are highlighted as essential components of a positive school environment (Bowers et al., 2017; Murphy et al., 2007). Hattie (2012) captures this crucial role of principals by reflecting on the reasons why teachers stay in the profession. He contends that the factor that explains the decision to stay or not – by a long way – relates to the nature of leadership:

> It is leaders…identifying and articulating high expectations for all, consulting with teachers before making decisions that affect teachers, fostering communications, allocating resources, developing organisational structures to support instruction and learning, and regularly collecting and reviewing with teachers' data on student learning. Learning leadership is the most powerful incentive in teaching (2012:153).

The challenge for the principal in this endeavour is to establish goals and a supportive environment for teachers to reach these goals together, in other words, 'the challenge is to develop an environment where everyone can flourish' (Earley, 2017:162). One way to respond to these challenges is to promote a culture of shared leadership.

Shared leadership

Over recent decades, several scholars point to the effectiveness of a collaborative approach to school leadership (Spillane and Diamond, 2007; Marks and Printy, 2003). Such leadership 'serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation' (Leithwood et al., 2008:29). Hallinger and Heck (2011) reveal a positive influence on student and school improvement when principals share leadership roles. Additionally, success was observed in schools where the principal strengthened the school's culture, modified organisational structures, and built collaborative practices. Further research by Neumerski (2012) uncovers the roles of principal, teacher and instructional coach and found that success can be achieved when these roles are connected in a distributed lens in leadership. This research postulates that instead of working in isolation, leaders achieved more success when they work as a team focused on a common goal.

The significance of shared leadership reflects previous research which explored effective change in schools and concluded that it is impossible for school principals to do it alone (Marsh, 2012; Elmore, 2000). Likewise, Day et al.'s (2009) research reveal that principals recognise the importance of extending staff participation, consulting with them regularly, and, in some cases, engaging pupils in school-wide decision-making. As Day and Sammons (2013:38) argue, organisational change and development 'are enhanced when leadership is broad-based, and teachers have opportunities to collaborate and actively engage in change and innovation'. O' Donovan (2015:260) argues that the 'solo leader cannot lead on his/her own' and suggests that 'power, influence and leadership' are distributed to teachers directly involved with teaching and student learning in the classroom. These findings echo Robinson et al. (2008:320-321) who contend that collaborative IL has shown to be one of the central tenets of principals' work, where 'teachers need to be empowered to experience leadership roles'.

From this perspective, LfL can be viewed as a joint activity based on team dynamics and puts an end to the idea that principals can provide the basis for change themselves (Day and Sammons, 2013). In summary, Hallinger (2011:138) suggests that when shared leadership is used well, it is 'a powerful tool for expanding the school's capacity to achieve its vision and creates it's own desired future. He continues that even when policy measures support shared leadership, 'the principal's own leadership is essential in fostering the leadership of others' (p.138).

Summary

The preceding sections reveal that the conceptualisation of LfL, while not restricted to any one LfL model, has strong linkages to previous leadership models. The five most recurrent themes are presented as the dimensions of LfL and provide the school leadership component of this study's theoretical framework, namely:

1. Creating the vision for learning.
2. Managing curricular and assessment programme.
3. Building relationships and developing people.
4. Fostering a positive school environment.
5. Shared leadership.

This review of school leadership literature indicates that each of these five dimensions needs to interact with the other four for any part to succeed. For example, it is challenging to carry out a

vision of student success if the school climate is characterised by teacher disengagement, or teachers do not know what instructional methods work best for their students, or if shared leadership is clumsily enacted. When all five dimensions are well carried out, LfL is at work.

In view of the preceding sections, school leadership development across the different dimensions of LfL comes into focus. Commenting on their research on how principals and teachers are aligned to LfL practices, Bowers et al. (2017:26-27) note that there is little evidence for teacher perception exceeding the leader perception of LfL, suggesting that for LfL practice, developing school leaders first is an important acknowledgement. It is this area of leadership development, specifically mentoring, that the focus of the literature review now turns.

3.3   Mentoring

According to Zachary (2000), the primary way to support principals is through quality mentoring. Highlighting the importance of preparation and induction for NAPs, Bush (2018:69) notes that almost 'all research on mentoring reports positive outcomes'. This section of the literature review explores research to demonstrate the integral role mentoring can play in the development of a school leader. The following categories are explored:

1.   Defining mentoring.
2.   Mentoring as professional development for NAPs.
3.   Theoretical perspectives of mentoring.
4.   Dimensions of effective mentoring.

3.3.1   Defining mentoring

The word 'mentor' comes from the character 'Mentor' in Homer's *Odyssey*. When Odysseus, king of Ithaca, went off fighting in the Trojan wars, he asked his trusted friend Mentor to advise and teach his son, Telemachus. Over time the notion of mentorship has been largely romanticised as a positive thing, though Greek conceptions portray a more complex relationship between Telemachus and Homer (Zachary, 2000)**.** As Young et al. (2005) note, mentoring relationships, like all relationships, can result in positive and negative experiences ranging from effective to dysfunctional.

Daresh (2004) emphasises that mentoring is a frequently used model of support providing personal and professional development in such sectors as art, industry and education. Searching for a comprehensive definition of mentoring is an ongoing endeavour for scholars. A 1991 review of mentoring literature across disciplines identified 15 different definitions (Jacobi, 1991). Neary 20

years later, Crisp and Cruz (2009) identified over 50 definitions for mentoring. Multiple researchers define mentoring relationships; the following are some examples. Mentoring is a transfer mechanism whereby skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours are intentionally taught to a less experienced mentee (Daresh, 2004). Forret and de Janasz (2005:484) suggest that the mentor as 'an influential individual in your work environment who has advanced experience and knowledge and who is committed to the enhancement and support of your career'. After pointing out the difficulty in defining mentoring, Kerry and Mayes (2014:7-8) list five 'essential components': nurturing, role modelling, functioning, focusing on the professional development of the mentee, and sustaining a caring relationship over time. Whereas Ambrosetti et al. (2014:224) suggest that a definition of mentoring is not needed, rather that mentoring is influenced by the context in which it is to be used and is often described according to that context. Haggard et al. (2011), reviewing various definitions of mentoring, contend that three common attributes distinguish mentoring relationships, reciprocity (mutuality of exchange), regular, consistent interaction over some period of time, and developmental benefits (tied to the mentee's career). Considering the various definitions, mentoring may be best defined as 'the process where one person provides individual support and challenge to another professional' (Bush, 2009:379).

For this study, I offer a working definition of mentoring. This definition reflects the work of Young et al. (2005:2) who contend that learning is the most important part of an effective mentoring programme. I propose the following definition:

> Mentoring is a supportive learning relationship between a senior colleague who shares knowledge, experience and wisdom with another who is ready and willing to benefit from this exchange, to enrich their professional practice.

Next, we turn our attention to mentoring as professional development for NAPs.

3.3.2   Mentoring as learning and professional development for newly appointed principals

Learning plays a critical role in everyone's life, not least for NAPs. Kolb (1984:38) contends that 'learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through transformation of experience'. Typically learning occurs when individuals interact with their environment. As Dewey (1938:44) notes:

> As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands, contracts. He does not find himself living in another world, but in a different

part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned as knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow.

Mentoring plays a key role in the learning of individuals (Daresh, 2004). The literature acknowledges that school principals, in particular NAPs, need ongoing professional learning opportunities to support school improvement and learning achievement (Oplatka and Lapidot 2017; Spillane and Lee 2014; Scott, 2010; Daresh, 2004). Bush (2009) defines professional development as an ongoing process designed to support educators to enhance the quality of schools. Earley (2020:118), supporting a more 'personalised' approach to leadership development, agrees with Budd and Earley (2013) that it is not so much the case of 'one size fits all' but rather that 'one size fits no one'. Earley (2020) contends that school leaders need to take greater responsibility for planning and implementing their own learning experiences to meet their personal and professional needs. In this respect, mentoring programmes have become very popular in principals' professional development (Bush, 2018; Gumus and Bellibas, 2016) and are widely accepted as having a positive impact on the leadership development of the NAP (Daresh, 2004).

Daresh (2007), comparing previous studies on mentoring school leaders, suggests that the focus of mentoring in earlier studies centred on the acquisition of management skills for novice principals with areas such as budgeting, scheduling, communicating, hiring procedures and paperwork requirements. Daresh (2007:23), exploring the journey of the mentee and mentor, contends that as NAPs spend more time getting used to the new leadership roles, they form what he describes as 'novice' to 'experienced' roles that divide into two categories, either 'risk-takers' (leaders) or 'risk avoiders' (managers)'. According to Daresh (2007), mentoring conversations with risk-takers focus more on the teaching and learning issues, while mentoring discussions with *risk avoiders* focus on managerial issues. From this perspective, it can be argued that NAPs not only need support to build their leadership capacity, but they also need a mentoring relationship with a mentor who helps 'push beyond the usual top-down managerial form of leadership practices to develop those that are instruction focused and supportive of practices known to impact student learning' (Clayton et al., 2013). Likewise, Young et al. (2005) highlight the necessity of providing professional learning opportunities to school principals to effectively perform their complex leadership roles. They suggest that 'today's school leaders need to have a comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices, work with teachers to provide continuous student improvement, and know how to provide support for staff to implement curriculum and instructional practices' (p.8). In this context,

mentoring as professional learning for NAPs is thought to be an effective means of acquiring understanding and knowledge for the role.

Similarly, effective mentorship behaviours include addressing power and power differentials within the mentoring relationship (Zachary, 2000). Successful mentoring relationships can be viewed progressively as a power exchange, which can operationally change the nature and dynamics of the relationship (Rippon and Martin, 2006). The literature suggests that mentoring practices that include navigating power differentials between mentors and mentees can affirm a sense of trust and a willingness to speak freely and express opinions without repercussion (Hayes, 2019; Daresh, 2007; Villani, 2006).

Daresh (2007) highlights two forms of mentoring programmes: firstly, the formal type that is officially instituted by an organisation with set objectives and intended outcomes and secondly, the informal type that happens when either party initiate, maintain and end the mentoring relationship with little or no organisational support. Initiatives to develop school leaders are most often provided in a structured, formal mentoring programme. Formal mentoring programme components often require mentors to provide feedback to their mentees, create professional development goals, meet face-to-face, and observe the mentees' professional practices (Gettys et al., 2010; Young et al., 2005). This study is concerned with formal mentoring to explore if the experience supports the development of NAPs' LfL practices.

The following section takes a closer look at mentoring as a form of professional learning for NAPs by exploring the different mentoring approaches evident in the literature.

3.3.3   Theoretical perspectives of mentoring

Teachers engaged in professional development are adult learners. Knowles (1980) developed the term andragogy to describe how adults learn as distinct from pedagogy which refers to how children and teenagers learn. The corpus of research reveals mentoring as a form of adult learning and a fundamental approach to developing and initiating new members into an organisation (Gettys et al., 2010). The literature about mentoring in a wide variety of disciplines (e.g., social work, medicine, education) has considered the attributes and benefits of organisational mentoring relationships (Young et al., 2005). Research from these fields provides a trend in consistent archetypes of mentoring scholarship. The majority of organisational mentoring reflects the influential work of Levinson et al. (1978) and Kram (1983).

The most widely cited and relevant framework on professional mentoring was developed by Kram (1983) through her in-depth study of corporate relationship pairs. Kram's (1983) significant contribution to the literature is developing two distinct mentoring support functions: career and psychosocial. Career support encourages advancement and may include coaching sponsorship, exposure, visibility, and protection. These functions are usually related to aspects of the mentoring relationship that can help the mentee 'to learn the ropes' (Kram, 1985:22). Psychosocial support develops the mentee's sense of competence, clarity of identity, effectiveness on the job, and friendship. The psychosocial support of mentoring may include role modelling, acceptance-and-confirmation, and counselling (Kram, 1983). Both of these supports are dependent on the successful matching of the mentor and mentee. Furthermore, Kram (1985) suggests that interpersonal skills may influence the initiation and development of mentoring relationships. Hence, the emphasis placed on fulfilling each of these functions may vary depending on the mentor and mentee's personality, context, and professional needs. Kram (1985:40) contends that 'individuals important needs will affect what functions are sought out and offered'.

One key tenet of mentoring is that it is a learning process (Young et al., 2005). Several authors (Daresh, 2004, 2007; Villani, 2006; Young et al., 2005; Zachary, 2000) provide three implications of adult learning in relation to mentoring: self-directed learning, developmental stages and socialisation process each of which are explored below.

Self-directed learning
Learning is key to effective mentoring (Zachary, 2000). Furthermore, Young et al. (2005:4) contend that the mentee needs to take an active role in the learning, stating:

> New principals' success when facing the steep learning curve during the first critical years of service depends on their ability to meet external expectations, develop interpersonal relationships, turn obstacles or barriers into goals and positive outcomes, and maintain their self-esteem and sense of pleasure in the work they do.

For Zachary (2009), the mentor should adopt a trusting facilitator role, in which he/she nurtures and guides the mentee towards self-direction. Echoing Daresh (2007), Young et al. (2006:4) suggest that 'problems and experiences need to be anchored, analysed, and understood in ways that encourage,

rather than minimise the mentee's willingness to take risks. Without learning on the part of the mentee, the mentoring experience is reduced to a transmissive experience'. For Daresh (2007) mentoring is not done in isolation; rather, there is value in learning how to learn. He also contends that it may behove school leaders to cultivate a motivational attitude that there will always be more to learn, whether they are a mentee or seasoned veteran. In this respect, emotional engagement is positively related to the extent to which a mentee learns (Chun et al., 2010).

Similarly, Zachary (2009) considers that mentoring relationships need to be goal-oriented and self-oriented. He calls this viewpoint of process-oriented mentoring relationship, a learning-centred mentoring paradigm. In this context, the mentee is being taught how to share responsibility for the learning and increasingly becomes self-directed with their own learning goals. When the mentee feels comfortable in holding this responsibility, the mentor encourages and supports the learner over the mentoring experience. In time, the mentor and mentee share the responsibilities of realising the mentee's goals. A predisposition to self-learning helps ensure that mentoring will have an effect (Daresh, 2007).

Development stages

According to Daresh (2007), early forms of mentoring were based upon the frameworks espoused by Levinson et al. (1978) and Knowles (1980). Mentoring reflecting these theorists' perspectives is seen as a developmental process for the mentee. It is used to enhance the professional development of the NAP. This contrasts with self-directed learning, as the mentor takes an active role in the mentee's learning and assumes a passive role as the individual develops professionally through experience. In this mentoring relationship, the mentor is a 'crucial actor in the development process…a mixture of parent and peer (Levinson et al., 1978:73). Levinson et al. (1978) focus on the life cycle phases of adults. In terms of life cycle phases correlating with adult education, it can be reasoned that all people mature at different rates; thus, the realisation of knowing the need to gain knowledge or skills arrives at different times in adults' lives. Hence, the desire to become an independent learner may not materialise until the need applies to an adult's life experiences in question (Bandura, 1977a).

Socialisation

The third framework views mentoring as a socialisation practice (Villani, 2006; Zachary, 2000; Daresh, 2004). This framework is driven by relationships and meeting the mentee's individual needs, where mentees observe and actively learn from the mentors who serve as role models (Bandura,

1977a). According to Opengart and Bierema (2015), effective mentoring depends on a mutual exchange between the mentor and protégé that is built on trust and openness and is sustained for as long as the mentoring relationship is needed. In this context, emotional engagement of both the mentor and the protégé is necessary for a successful relationship (Higgins and Kram, 2001), as the mentoring relationship 'is inherently reciprocal and interdependent' (Chun et al., 2010:428). Zachary (2000) proposes a model of mentoring where both mentor and mentee are fully engaged and learning from one another. Her model is based on critical reflection and application rather than knowledge transfer and acquisition. Evoking horticulture imagery, she describes four phases similar to the seasons of the growth of a plant. These four phases (figure 3.4) can be seen as a cycle of seasons where each component refers to specific features of a mentoring program.

Figure 3.4   **The four phases of mentoring**
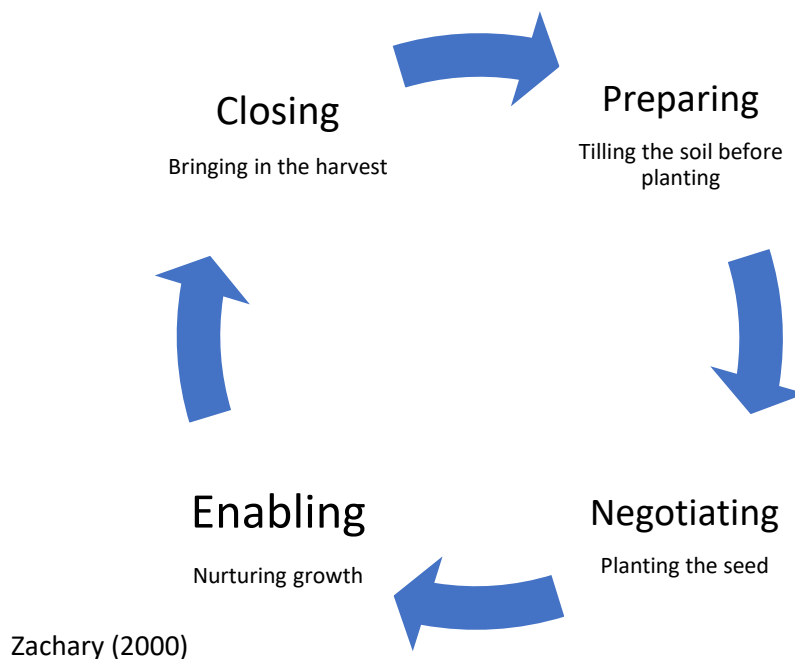
Zachary (2000)

The preparatory phase (tilling the soil before planting) guides the participants, including programme goals and uncovering assumptions about the relationship and working through the initial conversations. For Zachary (2000:65) this phase is 'critical to building and maintaining the relationship and forging connections that sustain the relationship over time'. This is followed by the negotiation phase (planting the seed), described as the 'business phases of the relationship' (p.50). This phase alludes to the development of the relationship between the mentor and mentee and is grounded in trust and confidentiality. The enabling phase (nurturing growth) takes longer to complete than the other three phases since this phase is the implementation phase of the learning

relationship. Here the focus is on nurturing the mentee's growth by establishing and maintaining an open and affirmative learning climate. The mentor provides constructive feedback ensuring the mentee's learning goals are met through formal activities such as observations and feedback, brainstorming and reflection. The closure phase (bringing in the harvest) represents the end of the programme and the variety of emotions associated with the end of a relationship (Young et al., 2005). Closure involves evaluating, acknowledging, and celebrating the achievement of learning outcomes.

Villani (2006) suggests mentoring is best accomplished when there is a hierarchy of professional socialisation. Professional socialisation comprises steps taken by the individual to become a member of the respective profession and develop an identity with that profession. Villani (2006:5) further comments on the importance of professional socialisation, noting that NAPs must have appropriate support through comprehensive mentoring programmes to enter schools confident in their ability to foster a strong learning community and be sensitive to the culture of the school.

3.3.4   Dimensions of mentoring

Given this study's focus, this section of the literature review devotes additional attention to specific features that are considered important for developing effective mentoring relationships. The mentoring literature shows that effective mentoring relationships relate to particular skills or competencies. Phillips-Jones (2001) identifies four key mentoring skills that should be developed during the mentoring process, including (1) listening actively, (2) building trust, (3) determining goals and building capacity and (4) encouraging and inspiring. Daresh (2001:70) brings together several fundamental skills that are used to develop the mentor/mentee relationship. These skills include:

> …listening to others, sharing information, treating others with respect, facilitating team membership, using situational leadership, developing informal relationships, giving feedback and being open to receiving feedback, giving others credit for their ideas, demonstrating a willingness to learn from others, and recognising and responding to the individual differences.

Constructed and distilled around the theoretical perspectives of mentoring and mentoring literature, I provide five dimensions required for effective mentoring. Figure 3.5 illustrates the formation of these five dimensions of mentoring, namely:

1. Matching of the mentor and mentee.

2. Mindset of the mentee.

3. Trust.

4. Feedback and reflection.

5. Emotional intelligence.

Figure 3.5   Dimensions of mentoring
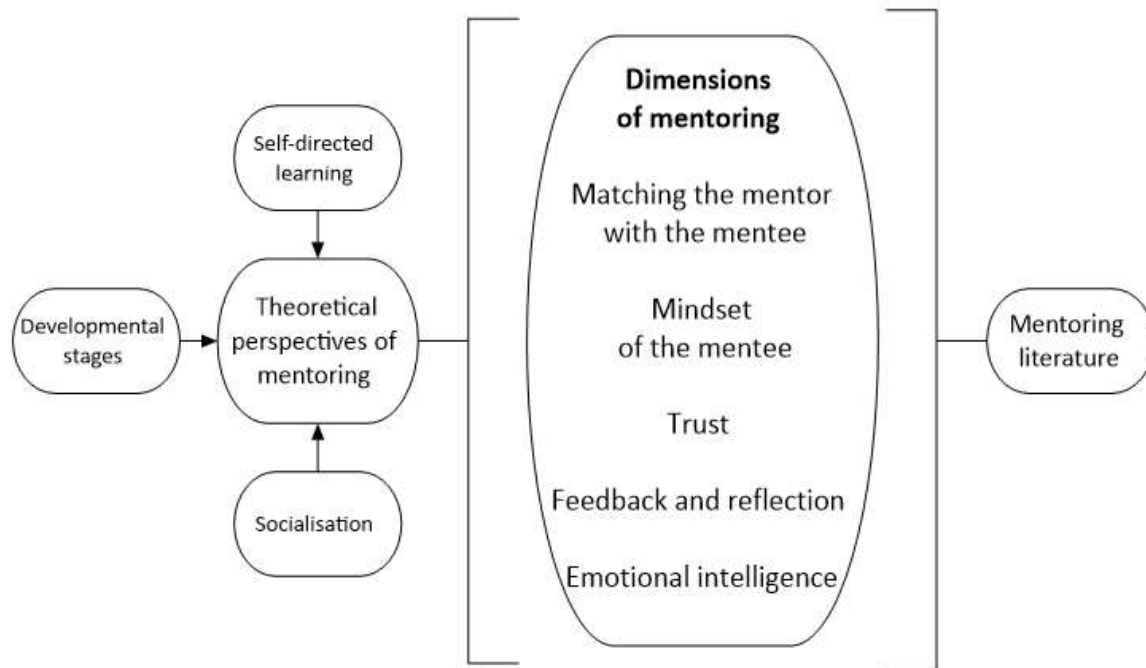
This figure is based on Opengart and Bierema (2015), Villani (2006), Young et al. (2005), Daresh (2001, 2004, 2007), Philip-Jones (2001), Zachary et al. (2000, 2005), Levinson et al. (1978), Knowles (1980), Kram (1983, 1985).

These five dimensions of mentoring emerge from the literature and form the lens from which specific features of mentoring relationships are considered in this study. The following section elaborates further on each of these mentoring dimensions.

Matching the mentor with the mentee

The relationship between the mentor and mentee is crucial to the success of the mentoring process (Oplatka and Lapidot, 2017; Ragins, 2016; Opengart and Bierema, 2015). For Zachary (2005), effective mentoring will only occur when time and effort is placed towards the pairing process. Furthermore, Daresh (2007) argues that to ensure the success of mentoring relationships, those who run the programme need to successfully communicate each person's role, establish a common language, and clarify the purpose of the programme. In addition, research has shown that mentoring

relationships that are founded on shared interests and goals can grow and nurture over time and are more likely to result in personal and professional growth for participants (Alderfer, 2014; Villani, 2006; Zachary, 2000). As such, according to Hayes (2019:208), much care and thought needs to be exercised 'in selecting mentors, ensuring they are recognised leaders of learning by their peers and who want to work with novice principals specifically on improving teaching and learning'.

The failure to ensure a 'good match' between the mentor and mentee can result in difficulties that can hamper the relationship from the beginning (Richardson, 2015). This discomfort is recognised by Zachary (2005:43) who contends that 'one of the most sensitive and toughest mentoring practices is the actual pairing dance itself... meeting potential mentor candidates can be a disquieting and uncomfortable process'. Furthermore, Daresh (2004) considers that mismatches can plague mentoring relations that often fail to support mentee's needs. This concern is echoed by Villani (2006) who warns that mismatches in terms of personality and expertise can undermine the conditions that are key to ensuring a highly interpersonal and developmental relationship. Therefore, the effectiveness of the mentor depends on his/her characteristics and whether an appropriate match has been made between the mentor and mentee (Daresh, 2007). Furthermore, Daresh (2004) argues that mentors sometimes give poor advice and, in some instances, make decisions for their mentees. In other words, the mentor had too much influence on the mentee, or the mentee was unable to make their own decisions.

Challenges in a mentoring relationship can evolve when participants fail to understand the nature of the shared responsibilities and expectations needed to create and sustain a positive working relationship (Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004). From this perspective, consideration needs to be given to ensure proper supports are provided to mentors to demonstrate the skills and capacity necessary to support the mentoring. This sense of expectation brings into view another critical feature influencing the mentoring process, the mindset of the mentee.

Mindset of the mentee

The word '*mindset*' refers to a person's attitudes, dispositions, inclinations and habits, and can be observed by noting a person's consistently demonstrated behaviours (Searby, 2014:258). Dweck (2008:6), researching the power of mindset in a person's performance in life, defines mindset as 'a person's belief in his or her personal qualities'.

Dweck popularised two mindset terms – fixed mindset and growth mindset – that have significance in mentoring relationships. The fixed mindset is the notion that one's abilities are set, making it nearly impossible for someone to change their abilities. Conversely, the growth mindset is the belief that one's 'basic qualities are things (one) can cultivate through (one's) efforts' (Dweck, 2008:7). A person with a growth mindset attitude believes that personal attributes are malleable and that individuals can develop traits and skills over time, especially if a learning orientation and effort are applied (Searby, 2014).

Individuals with a growth mindset believe that they can learn and achieve their goals or objectives through determination and effort. Mistakes do not discourage them because they view setbacks as learning and improvement opportunities. Individuals with fixed mindsets do not have a learning inclination; they typically have difficulty admitting mistakes and correcting deficiencies. An encouraging aspect of Dweck's (2008) research is that the elements of the growth mindset can be taught. The mindset concept can be applied to mentoring because the idea suggests a growth continuum in acquiring attitudes and abilities as one matures.

Associated with a 'growth mindset' is the importance of personal agency as a critical component in leader development, one where leaders engage themselves into seeking and processing information about their leadership to accelerate their development (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). For example, mentees who assume a greater amount of input into the mentoring process, reflecting self-directed learning (section 3.3.3.), have shown greater commitment and job satisfaction (Daresh, 2007; Young et al., 2000).

A related concept is a mentee's 'willingness' to be mentored (Hobson et al., 2009). The willingness of mentees to engage in mentoring can negate the challenge of finding time to engage in mentoring activities (Hayes, 2019; Daresh, 2004). Conversely, research suggests that a mentee's negative attitude can obstruct the success of a mentoring relationship, including an unwillingness to learn and change and not being open to moving out of one's comfort zone (Hobson and Malderez, 2013).

Therefore, a key aspect of having a growth mindset during the mentoring process is having a broader view of different possibilities by working with a trusted colleague. The relationship centres on improving participants' performance, and creating value together fosters trust (Dweck, 2007). The development of trust is crucial for all mentoring relationships (Searby, 2014).

Trust

One of the key factors that impact the success or failure of mentorship programmes is the presence of trust between the mentor and mentee (Opengart and Bierema, 2015; Phillips-Jones, 2001; McAllister, 1995). Furthermore, trust is crucial to school success because of the interdependence between all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, leaders, and students, as they collaborate to move a school forward. Supported by the work involving the concept of trust, Tschannem-Moran (2014) provides a definition based on five facets of trust. Trust is described as the willingness to be vulnerable, based on one's confidence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. Furthermore, trust is defined as the act of making oneself susceptible and believing that one's interests will not be harmed (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Without trust, relationships become rigid, and people can become self-protective.

Successful mentoring relationships unquestionably depend on trust. Research points to the importance of trust in a mentoring relationship that enables mentors to effectively support the mentee (Searby, 2014) and provide the grounding features of a positive mentoring experience (Ragins, 2016). Zachary and Fischler (2009) consider the reciprocal and trusting relationship that must be in place between a mentee and a mentor. The authors contend that a partnership should form with the purpose of working collaboratively on 'achieving mutually defined goals, developing skills, abilities, knowledge, and thinking' (p.2). Successful relationships do not just emerge; they need to be supported and nurtured with conversation and dialogue. Zachary and Fischler (2009) put it simply; 'relationships don't happen by magic'. They continue, 'without trust, a mentoring pair will simply be going through the motions of mentoring instead of truly implementing the process' (p.2). Moreover, Daresh (2007) consider that the absence of a trusting rapport between the mentor and mentee can result in a destructive mentoring relationship. Other adverse outcomes from a deficiency in trust in the relationship are jealousy and dependency, which could encourage behaviours that include rejecting feedback, taking advantage of mentoring time and marring the reputation of the other (Daresh, 2004). For trust to exist and be nurtured in a mentoring relationship, there needs to be opportunities for feedback and reflection.

Feedback and reflection

The merits of receiving effective feedback and engaging with reflective practices during the mentoring process is well documented in the literature (Augustine-Shaw and Liang 2016; Beattie et al., 2016; Young et al., 2005). Feedback can be either in the form of positive reinforcement or constructive criticism. The literature shows that mentees can possess various preferences for

positive or negative feedback (Ashford et al., 2003). The different elements of how and where feedback is provided can determine the recipient's level of acceptance. Mentees' preference for positive or negative feedback are important determinants of various cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions with which they react to feedback, and therefore, influence the potential impact feedback has on their development (Augustine-Shaw and Liang, 2016). Concerning mentoring, when communication between the mentor and mentee is honest and kept confidential, trust develops in the relationship, and honest feedback and reflection become a significantly positive factor in developing the NAP's self-confidence and job performance (Daresh, 2007; Young et al., 2005). To provide feedback that supports genuine reflective practice for the mentee, the mentor must exercise listening and observation skills specific to the context of the principal being mentored (Gettys et al., 2010). Supporting the reflective practices of the mentee, the mentor's questioning skills are fundamental. The role of questioning is how to draw out learning and ideas from the mentee using open questions rather than close ones, probing and challenging questions rather than leading ones (Zachary, 2000).

Dewey (1933:78) argues that 'We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience'. He thus defines reflection as 'active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads' (p.9). Supporting this view, Beattie et al. (2016), in a study to explore the effects of feedback, consider that receiving focused feedback increased participants' performance and the ability to reflect and perform specific tasks accurately. Similarly, Martin (1995:9) suggests that mentoring meetings can 'enable the less experienced colleague to reflect deeply on their experience...and to arrive largely at their own conclusions'. Therefore, as Searby (2014) notes, NAPs need to be able to truly reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and make leadership adjustments as needed.

Taken together, these studies indicate that effective feedback can enhance the mentee's reflective practice and professional development. A trusting relationship between the mentor and mentee creates an emotionally safe place for the principal to work through any defensive tendencies to interpret the feedback as accurate and valid (Goff et al., 2014).

From our discussion to date, it is clear that emotionality is central to mentoring (Cherniss, 2007). Further, it has been found that in mentors, there is a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the degree of confidence that a mentee has in them (Chun et al., 2010). The next

section explores how emotional intelligence can influence the effectiveness of mentoring relationships.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the capability of individuals to recognise their own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings, label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behaviour, and manage and adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal(s) (Goleman, 1998). There is a growing body of evidence around the importance emotional intelligence plays in success at work for school leaders (Harris, 2013; Cherniss, 2007; Leithwood and Beatty, 2006) and effective mentoring relationships (Opengart and Bierema, 2015; Taliadorou and Pashiardis, 2015; Chun et al., 2010; Cremona, 2010; Corrie, 2009; Boyatzis, 2007).

However, emotional intelligence is not without its critiques. Several scholars argue that there is no such thing as emotional intelligence (Murphy, 2006; Locke, 2005). Three key criticisms that have been levelled at emotional intelligence suggest that the concept is (1) poorly defined and poorly measured, (2) is a new name for familiar constructs that have been studied for decades, and (3) its claims are overblown (Locke, 2005). Furthermore, Blackmore (2011) raises concerns regarding emotional intelligence and its currency within leadership practice. She contends that 'treating emotions as an individualised attribute or something to be managed by leaders within a particular school, fails to recognise the historical and material conditions under which teachers and leaders work and students learn in ways that produce a shared sensibility' (Blackmore, 2011:221).

Despite the criticism levelled against the concept of emotional intelligence, mentoring literature highlights the degree to which participants share his or her emotions is related to learning and mentoring success. For example, Chun et al. (2010) conclude from a study of mentoring dyads that the overall mentoring process increases trust between mentees and mentors when the mentor exhibits a higher level of emotional intelligence. Similarly, Opengart and Bierema (2016:252), following a systematic review of existing literature to illustrate how emotional intelligence affects mentoring relationships and influences its effectiveness for participants, suggest that 'it is essential to select a mentor who is high in emotional intelligence and uses his or her emotional competence to maximize the potential of the mentoring relationship'.

While Cremona (2010) explored the emotional responses of coaches, her recommendations are equally relevant for our discussion. She suggests that training for coaches should involve empathy, body awareness, and relationship building and connect emotions to engagement, motivation,

resilience, leadership, and managing change. She advocates that leaders need to 'demystify their views about emotions and expand and deepen their approach towards emotion in the workplace' (p.58).

In the context of school leadership, emotional intelligence is a key attribute of innovation and effective school leadership and a complementary resource for creating competent school leaders (Benson et al., 2014). For Goleman and Boyatzis (2008:2), leading effectively through emotional intelligence is 'less about mastering situations—or even mastering social skill situation sets—than about developing a genuine interest in and talent for fostering positive feelings in the people whose cooperation and support you need'. Brennan and MacRuairc (2011:136-137) describe the emotional landscape for school leaders as one where:

> Emotional conditions of 'fitness', 'literary and depth' and 'alchemy' are required for school improvement and need to be fostered by the leaders as to create trust, positive feelings of involvement and ownership, positive relationships, communication, self-reflection, improved practice and the engagement of teachers in leadership roles.

Maxwell and Riley (2016:2) explore this emotional stretch on school leaders and suggest that 'school principals continuously meet multiple stakeholders at different developmental levels... all of whom may sometimes display extremely high levels of emotional arousal'. This can be emotionally demanding and lead to increased levels of anxiety and reduced levels of job satisfaction (Maxwell and Riley, 2016). The literature identifies various leadership practices that respond to these challenges, including the development of healthy relationships and the routine of 'listening, openness and asking for input' (Slater, 2005:327) and effective communication using clear and expressive prose (Salovey et al., 2004).

Emotions influence the roles and expectations of school leaders. While letting go of control can cause fear and vulnerability (Brennan and MacRuairc, 2011:135), leaders cannot direct schools towards improvement without demonstrating attributes of emotional intelligence (Bush, 2011b). The shift towards a more collaborative leadership approach (section 2.4) has increased the need for mentors to support school leaders to be emotionally aware and attuned to the power and influence therein (Searby, 2014).

Summary

Supporting, strengthening, and encouraging NAPs is the ultimate goal of mentoring (Daresh, 2004). The five dimensions of mentoring explored above identify several features that can support and sustain effective relationships that advance learning opportunities for mentees. Furthermore, it can be assumed that mentoring programmes built upon adult learning theories can help with school leaders' development (Zachary, 2000). Young et al. (2005:2) summarise the significance of the relationship between learning and mentoring, stating 'learning is the most important part of an effective mentoring programme, and it is ongoing. When learning is not the primary focus, the partnership fails'.

What becomes clear from the literature is that learning is central to the concepts of mentoring and LfL. The former as professional learning and the latter as student learning. The following section explores the relationship between mentoring and LfL through the lens of SCLT and provides a theoretical bridge linking the dimensions of LfL and mentoring.

3.4   Social cognitive learning theory: connecting mentoring and leadership for learning

Learning theories are rarely cited in research concerning mentoring programmes and relationships. However, if learning theories are cited to explain mentoring, Bandura's (1986) SLCT is the one most frequently mentioned (Bertrand et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2016). SCLT posits that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the cognitive, environment, and behaviour. The theory considers a person's past experiences, which factor into whether behavioural action will occur (Dominguez and Hager, 2013). These past experiences influence expectations, all of which shape whether a person will engage in specific behaviour and the reasons why a person engages in that behaviour (Bandura, 1986). The unique feature of SCLT is the emphasis placed on social learning and its emphasis on external and internal social reinforcement. This has important considerations for this study as mentoring and LfL are grounded on different philosophies of learning.

One can argue that there is a 'mismatch' between the learning associated with mentoring and LfL. For example, mentoring is development driven, taking into account the mentee's background, experiences, and context where learning outcomes are open (Daresh, 2004). In contrast, LfL is often critiqued as a limited view of students' learning that focuses on narrow outcomes (Smythe and Wrigley, 2013; Dimmock, 2012). Acknowledging this apparent 'mismatch', this study posits that SCLT is an important learning theory that can act as a philosophical bridge between the two concepts.

First, LfL, like all leadership, is contextual; what works in one setting may not work in another (Allen, 2007). In this context, mentoring can provide supports that help mentees better understand their environment and how it affects those within it (Zachary, 2009). On a more individualised level, SCLT underlines the need for school leaders to demonstrate desired behaviour(s). Proponents of social learning assert that leaders who do not model desired behaviour undermine efforts to effect lasting change (Allen, 2007). The challenge for NAPs (section 3.2.4) is to epitomise behaviours that empower staff and students to reach their potential and ensure leadership and learning is about more than academic results and adhering to policy objectives (Earley, 2017). With this in mind, SCLT describes that mentees observe how different behaviours in their mentors are either rewarded or punished and emulate behaviours that are rewarded.

Recognition of mentoring as a learning process is foundational for all learning theories (Dominguez and Hager, 2013; Zachary, 2009). When viewed through the lens of SCLT, mentees are active participants who must critically reflect on success and failure, participate in self-directed learning, and learn through doing. SCLT encourages these roles for mentees and generates active learning from mentors (Dominguez and Hager, 2013). In the social cognitive view, mentees are shaped by their inner being and by external forces. Modelling is an essential aspect of learning in SCLT. In addition, included in SCLT is the idea that people can control their own behaviours. This is referred to as self-regulatory capacities. This control allows mentees to draw on their own experiences and observations and then process their thoughts before acting. Hence, they can self-reflect on previous decisions and apply this to their actions.

A noted above, SCLT is grounded in the belief that human behaviour is determined by a three-way relationship between cognitive, environmental and behaviour factors (Bandura, 1986). The interaction between the factors is not one way but reciprocal, and all influence each other. This tripartite relationship is referred to as the reciprocal causation model (RMC) and is presented in figure 3.6. This understanding led to Bandura's further work on SCLT which expanded his work on SLT and identified RCM as the basis for SCLT.

Figure 3.6　　　　　　　　**Reciprocal causation model**

Cognitive Factors
(Personal factors)
(Self-efficacy)
(Motives)

Enivronmental Factors
(Situation)
(Models)
(Relationships)

Behavioural Factors
(Complexity)
(Duration)
(Skill)
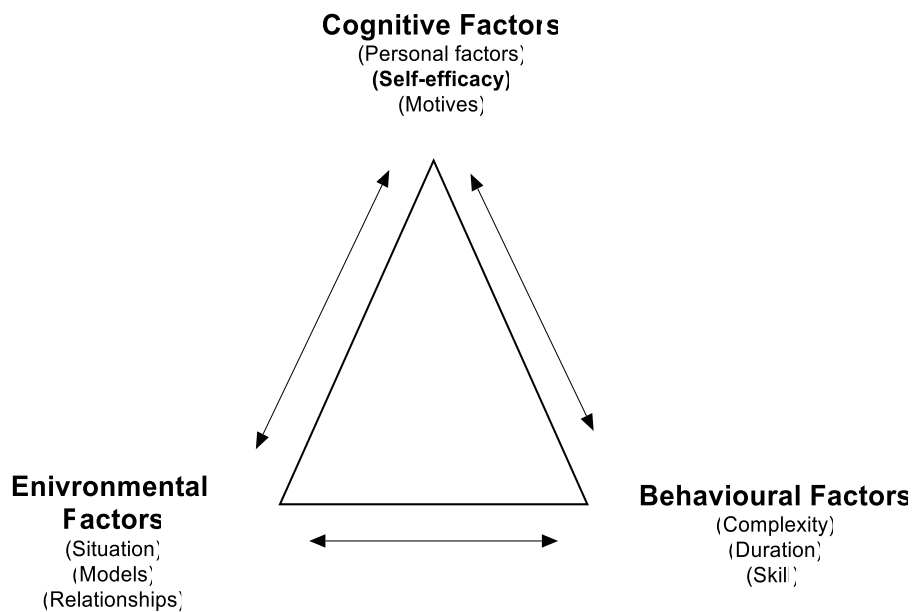
(Bandura, 1986)

Learning that occurs in this social context and influenced by both mentor and mentee personalities can be called social learning. Residing within the three factors are nine related influences. For this study, I focus on the influence of self-efficacy on a person's behaviour. According to van Knippenberg et al. (2004), one aspect of leadership identity thought to be most relevant to enhancing leader development and performance is a leader's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is important not only in driving leader effectiveness but also because it influences choices of which experiences and challenges to pursue, and thereby, opportunities for leadership development (Bandura, 1997). This study suggests that a school leader's self-efficacy is a critical component that can influence the development of NAPs' LfL practices and an aspect of leadership that can be effectively developed in mentoring relationships (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Paglis and Green, 2002). Consequently, the self-efficacy component of SCLT, is explored further in the following section.

Learning through self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Bandura (1997) describes these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel. According to van Knippenberg et al. (2004), a key element thought to be most relevant to enhancing a mentee's development and performance is the mentee's self-efficacy. A strong sense of self-efficacy promotes

human accomplishment and personal well-being (Bandura, 1997). A person with high self-efficacy views challenges as things that are supposed to be mastered rather than threats to avoid. These individuals are able to recover from failure faster and are more likely to attribute failure to a lack of effort (Crow, 2001). Paglis and Green (2002) believe that self-efficacy allows leaders to accomplish the following tasks: setting the vision for where the work should be headed, gaining followers' commitment to change goals, and overcoming obstacles standing in the way. They approach threatening situations with the belief that they can control them (Bandura, 1997). Moreover, Bandura and Locke (2003) contend levels of motivation and performance rely heavily on self-efficacy beliefs. Therefore, NAPs with higher levels of self-efficacy, it can be argued, will have higher levels of motivation to develop leadership practices that support and improve student learning.

In exploring teachers' self-efficacy, SCLT guided many studies in this field, which is largely considered the foundational base for understanding the concept of self-efficacy. The four sources of self-efficacy encompass enactive mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1987). Similar to Paglis and Green (2002) and van Knippenberg et al. (2004) this study used these four sources as the basis to establish theoretical links between mentoring and self-efficacy.

Enactive mastery

Enactive mastery is the notion that people who encounter success tend to have a higher self-efficacy level than people who experience disappointment (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). Moreover, if a person experiences success after having gone through adversities, he or she tends to have an even greater sense of self-efficacy. If people experience only easy successes, they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure (Bandura, 1997:80). Bandura (1977a:83) continues that mastery of challenging tasks 'conveys new efficacy information for raising one's beliefs in one's capabilities. Enactive mastery is reliant upon success'. This suggests mentoring that helps mentees make meaning of their previous leadership experience could be crucial in influencing leadership practices.

Verbal persuasion

Verbal persuasion implies that people are more likely to believe in themselves if others believe in their abilities as well; this can come in the form of verbal persuasion (Kram, 1985). 'People who are persuaded verbally that they possess the capabilities to master given tasks are likely to mobilise greater effort and sustain it than if they harbour self-doubt and dwell on personal deficiencies when difficulties arise' (Bandura, 1997:101). Even when feedback is negative, mentors can provide

feedback in a positive manner, highlighting what was learnt and how feedback can influence future performance. For example, the use of feedback with effective questioning can promote self-efficacy in individuals (Schulze, 2010). Verbal persuasion (feedback) cannot be the sole component of developing self-efficacy but should be used in combination with other efficacy influences (Merriam and Bierema, 2014).

Vicarious experience

Vicarious experience is the ability to learn through the actions of others; this is considered modelling (Kram, 1985). Self-efficacy beliefs can be reinforced if a person witnesses another person's behaviour and compares it to his or her own. 'People appraise their own capabilities in relation to the attainments of others' (Bandura, 1997:86). People compare themselves to others to help determine their success or failure in a particular attainment. Modelling serves as a guide to support the learning process. Bandura refers to this as 'informative learning' where the person involved may determine when to exhibit the behaviour learned (Bandura, 1977:22). The creative strategies modelled by mentors are often drawn upon by mentees to establish new patterns of behaviour that go beyond what was observed. Hence, a mentor would potentially represent that prototypical leader for the mentee, this fostering their self-efficacy.

Physiological and affective states

Self-efficacy can be influenced by physiological and affective states. If people feel stress, they may relate these feelings to poor performance, which ultimately impacts self-efficacy. Therefore, an individual's mindset and mood are determinants of self-efficacy related to physiological and affective states. Here mentors could serve in the role of inspiring and 'stirring the passions' of mentees to motivate their leadership development. 'Positive mood enhances perceived self-efficacy, and a despondent mood diminishes it' (Bandura, 1994:72). Physiological and affective states do not contribute to self-efficacy alone but are key indicators that prompt a person's reactions and interpretations of these states that influence self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy affects whether individuals think optimistically or pessimistically in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways. Therefore, according to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy plays a central role in the self-regulation of motivation through set goals and expected outcomes. As such, self-efficacy lies at the centre of SCLT and shows that beliefs about one's ability will influence current and future behaviour. Figure 3.7 illustrates the four primary sources that influence a person's self-efficacy and identifies how learning takes place through each source.

Figure 3.7   **The four sources of self-efficacy**
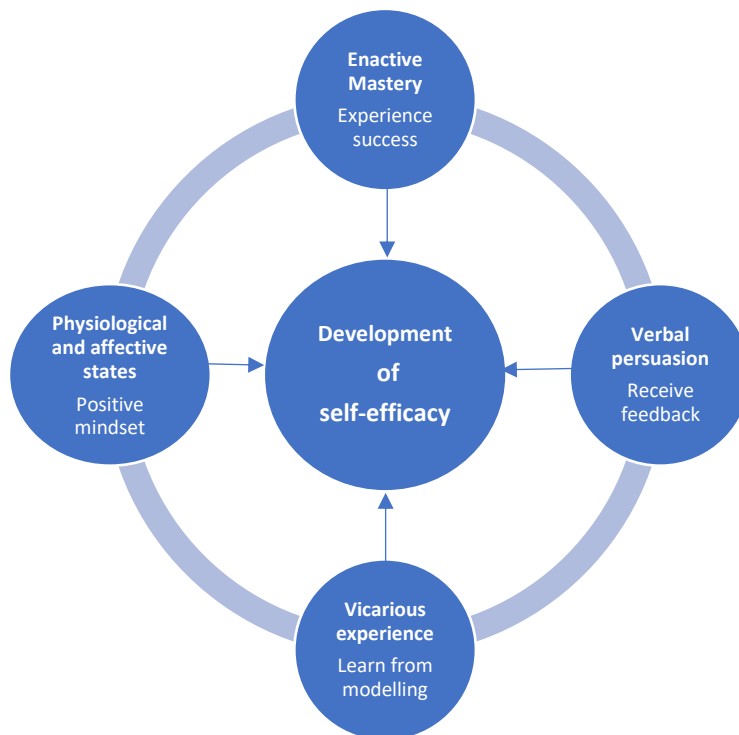
(Bandura, 1997)

Bandura (1977) asserts that behaviour is learned through observation. The process of mentoring has followed this research claim. Mentors can help guide NAPs by modelling reflective behaviour and sound mental processes. To put it simply, 'mentoring is a process that offers adult learner models to observe' (Merriam and Bierema, 2014:35). For example, an experienced principal might model how he/she thinks about engaging the opinions of staff to illustrate the thought process of reflection on their actions in specific situations and thus, 'reflection becomes part of a continuous learning process' (Sergiovanni and Green, 2015:5). This study posits that a mentorship program targeting the four primary sources of self-efficacy discussed above would be particularly effective in raising NAPs' self-efficacy and developing NAPs' LfL practices. Indeed, these four sources of self-efficacy are inherent in any effective mentoring relationship (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Paglis and Green, 2002). From this discussion, SCLT and the associated concept of self-efficacy apply to mentoring relationships and, as such, forms the theoretical bridge to explore the two central concepts of this study: the dimensions of LfL and the dimensions of mentoring.

3.5   Theoretical framework

This study seeks to utilise my theoretical framework, the *leadership mentoring framework* (figure 3.8) as the 'underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame' of this research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:85). The framework draws upon the concepts, terms, definitions, models and theories of LfL, and mentoring. The dimensions of LfL capture how school leaders operationalize leadership in their schools. The dimensions of mentoring identify practices that can support effective mentoring. Finally, SCLT, encompassing the sources of self-efficacy (enactive mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience and physiological and affective states), provides the theoretical bridge between LfL and mentoring. The *leadership mentoring framework* provides the overall orienting lens for the exploration of this study's research questions.

Figure 3.8   The leadership mentoring framework
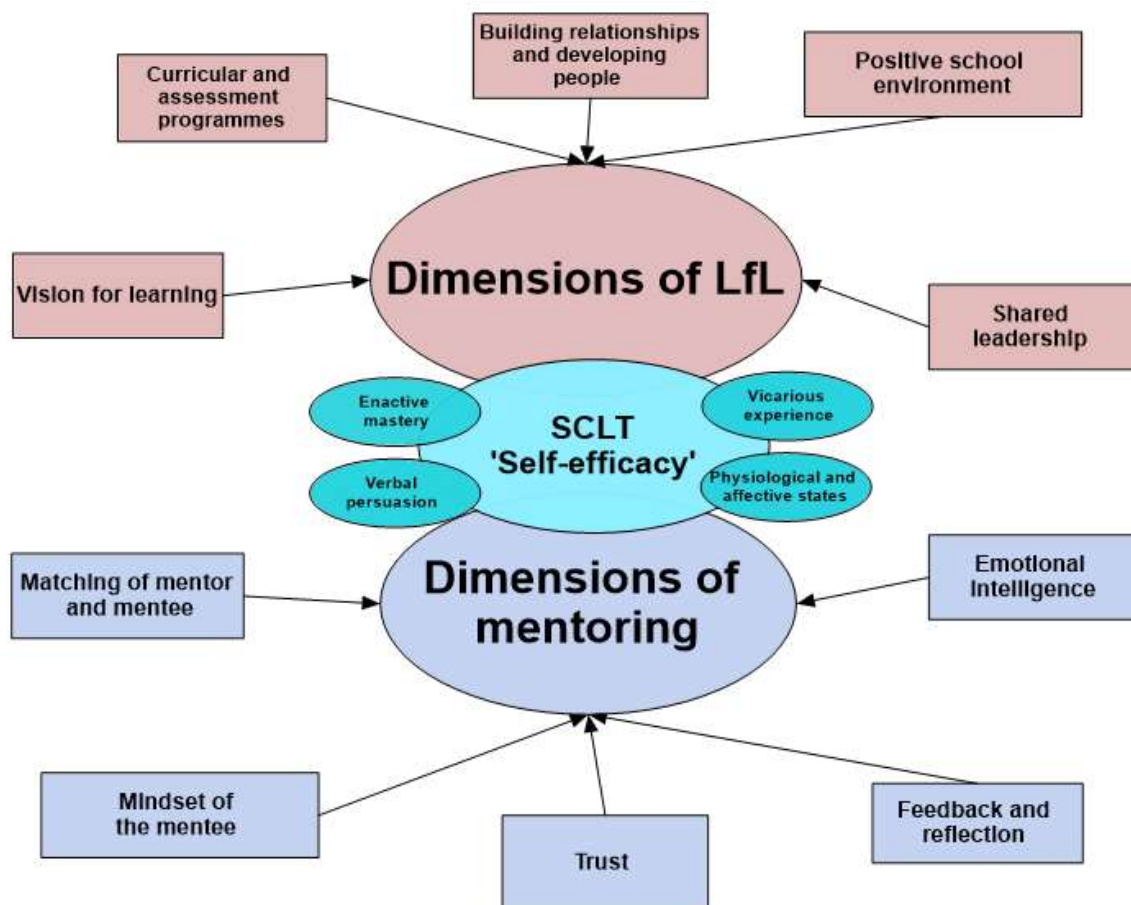
In synthesising the key elements from the literature, the *leadership mentoring framework* identifies LfL within five dimensions outlined in section 3.2.6:

1. *Creating a vision for learning*. Described as establishing a shared school vision focused on the development of teaching and learning (Robinson, 2011).

2. *Managing curricular and assessment programmes*. Described as an explicit focus on student achievement (Hallinger, 2011) and aims to impact school performance by creating and sustaining a school-wide focus on learning (Hallinger and Heck, 2011).

3. *Building relationships and developing people*. Described as placing the focus on relationships to improve learning (Bowers et al., 2017) and identify the types of teachers' professional development that are likely to impact student learning (Robinson, 2011).

4. *Fostering a positive school environment*. Described as the practice of intentionally listening to teachers to improve school-wide relationships, to establish goals and a supportive environment for teachers to reach these goals together (Earley, 2017).

5. *Promoting shared leadership*. Described as sharing leadership so that success can be achieved through the school's teaching body to find and achieve new goals, individually and collectively (Hallinger and Heck, 2011; Swaffield and MacBeath, 2009).

Mentoring relationships are explored through five interconnected dimensions:

1. *Matching of mentor and mentee*. Mentoring relationships that are founded on shared interests and goals can grow and nurture over time and are more likely to result in personal and professional wellbeing for participants (Alderfer, 2014).

2. *Mindset of the mentee*. A mentee with a growth mindset attitude believes that personal attributes are malleable and that individuals can develop traits and skills over time, especially if a learning orientation and effort are applied (Searby, 2014).

3. *Trust.* Successful relationships do not just emerge; they need to be supported and nurtured with conversation and dialogue. Without trust, a good mentoring relationship will just not happen (Zachary and Fischler, 2009).

4. *Feedback and reflection*. When mentors provide feedback to mentees and help them reflect on the daily experiences as they apply leadership theories in their new

role, it can assist NAPs to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Ashford et al., 2003).

5. *Emotional intelligence.* Mentoring relationships play a key role in supporting NAPs as they settle into their new roles (Searby, 2014). A critical key to mentoring success is missing without understanding how emotional intelligence affects the mentoring relationship (Opengart and Bierema, 2015).

The theoretical framework represents mentoring as a form of social learning. By placing SCLT as the theoretical bridge between LfL and mentoring, the framework (a) identifies learning as something that can be observed and reflected upon through the mentoring process and (b) provides NAPs with opportunities to enact LfL practices that can improve teaching and learning.

To render the necessary support to maintain an effective mentoring partnership, a crucial step in the process is developing a supportive and positive relationship (Daresh, 2004) that supports mentees' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). As different scholars have discovered that different mentoring features/functions predict different outcomes for mentees (Ragins, 2016), it is necessary to consider mentoring relationships and how mentoring affects mentees' behaviours and actions. To accomplish this, this study explores how mentoring can influence the efficaciousness of mentees in developing LfL practices. Although NAPs can have high levels of self-efficacy in general, they may not exhibit these behaviours as leaders of learning. If principals learn through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, physiological and affective states, one may conclude that the level of these experiences through mentoring may impact their self-efficacy in the identified LfL dimensions.

In essence, the theoretical framework explores the relationship between mentoring and positive self-efficacy in developing LfL practices of NAPs to explore the research question: h*ow can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?*

3.6   Conclusion
At present, there is no research on the development of LfL practices of NAPs following the completion of a mentoring programme in Ireland. This study attempts to address this gap in the

literature. Current research highlights the necessity to improve and expand development provision for school leaders; however, further research on current provisions is necessary considering the distribution and complexity of school leadership practices (Murphy, 2019).

This chapter explored three key concepts: LfL, mentoring, and SCLT. First, an overview of leadership models was presented, focusing on the reincarnation of IL as LfL (Hallinger, 2011). Previous and current literature on LfL provides clarity towards a definition and broad appreciation of this leadership approach. Following a review of pertinent literature, five key leadership dimensions were presented as core LfL practices for school leaders: (a) creating a vision for learning, (b) managing the curriculum and assessment programmes, (c) building relationships and developing people, (d) fostering a positive school environment, and (e) shared leadership. Second, the chapter provided an overview of mentoring, including its origins, definition and rationale, referencing the relevant scholarship pertaining to professional mentoring. Specifically, the literature considered different theoretical concepts of mentoring, highlighting five key dimensions of effective mentoring: (a) matching of the mentor and mentee, (b) mindset of the mentee, (c) trust, (d) feedback and reflection, and (e) emotional intelligence.

SCLT provides the bridge between the dimensions of LfL and the dimension of mentoring. This theory, along with Bandura's research in the field of self-efficacy, comprise the theoretical framework that guided this research. Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. NAPs with high self-efficacy levels may take on new behaviours and tasks with confidence that may influence their leadership practices.

In conclusion, the tenets of the study's theoretical framework, *the leadership mentoring framework*, were developed and presented. The constituents of this framework serve as the foundational underpinnings of the methodology and analysis for this study and are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4
Methodology

4.1   Introduction

This study addressed the following overarching research question: how can mentoring be used if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning? Engaging in research involves choosing a study design that corresponds to the research question(s) on the one hand while reflecting if the design is a 'good' match with the researcher's worldviews, persona, and skills on the other (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Hence, it is crucial to understand this study's philosophical foundations and the informed decisions taken in relation to choices made in designing and implementing the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This chapter explores the theoretical, conceptual and practical considerations that informed the research design.

Beginning with an overview of the research design and structure, this chapter considers the personal and professional reflection from which the research questions emanated. Locating the study within the social constructivist, interpretive research paradigm, I argue for a qualitative methodology to explore the development of LfL practices of NAPs. The following section outlines the decisions taken regarding the sample and data collection methods, namely semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group. Next, the reader is provided with an overview of the sequential approach to data collection. This section describes the approach to data analysis and the rationale for using reflective thematic analysis espoused by Braun and Clarke (2006). Concerns about validity and reliability are explored, identifying the strategies and considerations that support the study's fairness and transparency. In conclusion, the ethical standards applied throughout the various stages of the process are detailed and outlined.

4.2   Research design

Research design is that theoretical framework that provides a structure for collecting and analysing data and subsequently indicates which research methods are most appropriate (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). The researcher's key consideration is which approaches and methods will produce the most rigorous and coherent research so that the process will produce reliable results to shed light on the research questions. The most crucial methodological choice for researchers is based on the distinction made between qualitative (descriptions based on language and images), quantitative (descriptions based on numbers) data or mixed-method (combining qualitative and quantitative) approaches.

As this study explores and understands the meanings that individuals ascribe to a human problem (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), the research design adopts a qualitative approach. Making a choice to use this research approach was an easy decision given the ability of qualitative research to enable the researcher to gain understanding from and find meaning in human perspectives and experiences. To explore ideas about the development of LfL practices of NAPs', it seemed appropriate and necessary to speak to NAPs. Braun and Clarke (2013:3-4) put it simply, 'the most basic definition of qualitative research is that it uses words as data collected and analysed in all sorts of ways'.

This study employs a sequential qualitative mixed-method design (Morse, 2010). The initial phase of data collection consisted of ten semi-structured interviews. The preliminary data from this phase of data collection, including the dominant narratives and issues raised, influenced the questions for the second method of data collection, a focus group interview. Data analysis commenced following the collection of data from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group.

To support the exploration of the data, the theoretical framework, t*he leadership mentoring framework*, outlined in Chapter three, is utilised to focus the inquiry and interpret the data. Investigating how mentoring supports the development of LfL practices of NAPs provides opportunities to collect rich data about understanding the meaning participants have constructed. A qualitative research methodology is best understood when approached with 'how' questions and exploring individual experiences (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016:5). Understanding the nature of this type of research approach is provided by exploring the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research, namely the researcher's positionality and philosophical worldviews.

4.2.1   Positionality

The nature of qualitative research places the researcher as the data collection instrument. It is reasonable to expect that the researcher's beliefs, personal and professional life experiences are essential variables that may affect the research process. The researcher's contribution to the research setting can be useful and positive rather than detrimental (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016) however, it rests with the researcher to determine which one. My past and current professional experiences influence my position in this research. It is essential to understand my role as both a researcher and an educator and examine the distinction between the two. I embody a location where objectivity and subjectivity meet (Bourke, 2014) by being a post-primary school principal, currently on secondment to a post-primary support service, and a researcher.

My professional experiences have shaped my perceptions of school leadership and mentoring. From 2005 until 2008, I served as deputy principal in a 500-pupil school in a large rural town. My next appointment was principal of a 400-pupil school in a small rural town. In 2010 I was appointed principal to a 600-pupil school in a large rural town. In 2018, I was seconded as a team leader to the JCT support service. This role brings me into close contact with teachers and school leaders, providing them with professional development support as they continue to enact Junior Cycle reform in their schools. As a school leader, I attended JMB and NAPD regional and national meetings. I was a member of JMB advisory committees and presented at educational conferences. These experiences have afforded me the awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to the many challenges, decisions and issues that face NAPs and help me work with the participants in this study. Due to current and previous experiences working with school principals, I bring certain biases to the study. Although every effort was made to ensure objectivity, these biases may shape how I collect, view and understand the data and interpret my experiences.

I commenced this study with the underlying assumption that principals want to become influential leaders, applying the key dimensions of LfL outlined in section 3.6. This assumption is based on my personal experiences as a principal and my work with JCT supporting school leaders and teachers. I position myself as both an insider and an outsider (Bourke, 2014), as an insider sharing commonalities with principals in the realm of effective leadership practices, and as an outsider currently seconded to a support service.

My professional experiences mould my passion for education and my desire to engage in this research; they also influence the philosophical worldview I espouse. The following section explores the philosophical ideas underpinning this study.

4.2.2   Philosophical underpinnings of this study

The nature of questions that emerge from my interest in the professional development of NAPs is concerned with participants' attitudes, ideas and perceptions of their mentoring experiences. The philosophical underpinnings of this study, see figure 4.1, illustrate the interconnection of my worldviews, design and research methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Figure 4.1   **Philosophical underpinnings of this study**
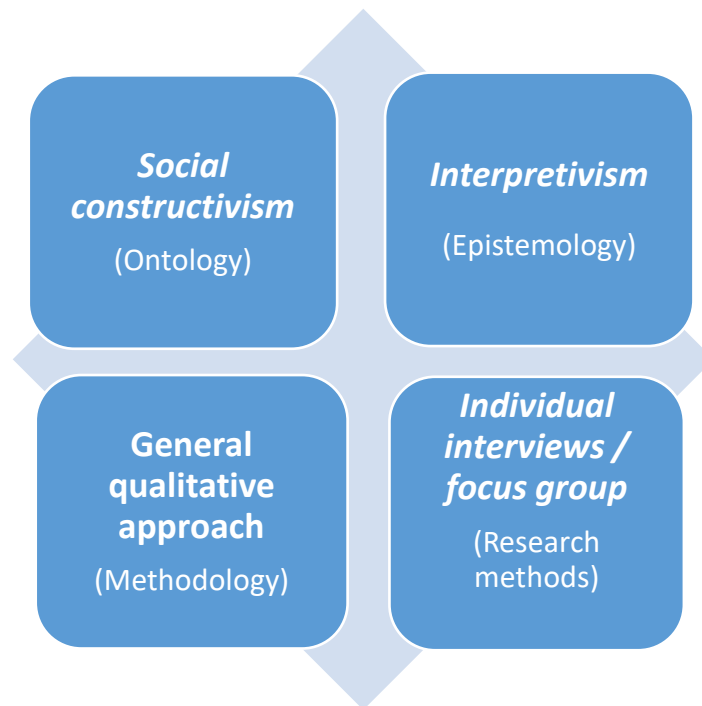
My ontological stance is from a social constructivism mindset, where the world is understood through building and creating experiences. My epistemology is interpretivism, where participants' experiences are interpreted. A general qualitative methodology is an appropriate approach that incorporates semi-structured interviews and a focus group as the method of data collection. These research elements are now explored in turn below.

Ontology - social constructivism

Acknowledging the ongoing debate about what worldviews or beliefs researchers bring to the inquiry, four worldviews are widely discussed in the literature: postpositivism, transformative, pragmatism and social constructivism (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It is important to provide some background of each worldview as this will better establish the beliefs underpinning this research.

Postpositivists hold a deterministic philosophy in which causes (probably) determine effects or outcomes. Thus, this approach's focus reflects the need to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes, such as those found in experiments (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). A transformative worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda to confront social oppression at whatever level it occurs (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). Hence, such research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the participants'

lives, the institutions in which individuals work and the researcher's life. There are many forms of pragmatism, but for many, this worldview arises out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions (as in postpositivism). Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasise the research problem and question and use all approaches to understand the problem (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Finally, social constructivists believe that individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. Social constructivism is an interpretative framework explaining a worldview in which people seek an understanding of the world they live in (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

This study adopts a social constructivist mindset as the priority is to understand, interpret, and make sense of participants' meanings. Creswell (2014) outlines the need for the social constructivist researcher to pay particular attention to relative interaction, the subjective meanings of worldviews of others, and the complexity of those views to focus on interpretation. The goal of the researcher is to focus on participants' views of the situation being studied. Hence the questions for this study are broad and general so that participants can construct meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As this study focuses on NAPs' experiences of mentoring in developing LfL practices, acquiring and interpreting the individual and multiple realities that participants bring to the discussion is essential in answering the research questions.

Epistemology - interpretivism

By nature, a social constructivist worldview aligns with a qualitative interpretive approach whereby the researcher seeks to understand the meanings of participants' data and acts as the fundamental instrument for data collection and data analysis (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Whereas ontology is the sphere of philosophy that focuses on the nature of reality, epistemology is the sphere of philosophy that focuses on knowledge and asks questions about how we know what we know (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Interpretivism is one epistemological framework that supports qualitative research. Interpretivism enables researchers to find meaning in the world through social situations and where educational researchers can insert themselves into the continuous process of meaning-making to gain a better understanding (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). I view social interactions as the primary source of obtaining meaning about the reality of NAPs' lived experiences. As a practitioner, I am also aware of personal and contextual considerations crucial to how principals view their work. As a researcher, I acknowledge the various interpretations of work among NAPs

following the completion of a mentoring programme. As such, reflection is a crucial cognitive practice during my research.

My current and previous experience as a post-primary principal promotes empathy with participants, supporting a free-flowing conversation where many of the characteristics of the role of principalship are mutually understood. From this perspective, I clearly describe the intersecting contextual relationships between the participants (reflexivity) as this increases the credibility of the findings and deepens the reader's understanding of the work (Creswell, 2018). As a practising school principal currently working with school leaders through a support service, I have preconceived ideas about leadership practices. Using reflexivity (explored further in section 4.6.1) encourages me to think through, test, wonder, and reflect on what I heard during the interviews and the focus group.

Also, I was conscious that the interpretive researcher operates in a tradition where there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories. Instead, the focus is to develop constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest through the meanings people assign to them (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). From this interpretive overview of the research design, the methodology of the study comes into view. This study adopts the most common qualitative research type, a generic qualitative study, referred to by Merriman and Tisdell (2016) as a general qualitative approach.

Methodology – General qualitative approach

Qualitative research collects, analyses, and interprets comprehensive information about an existing phenomenon to extract meaning (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research aims at answering the 'how' and the 'what' questions when examining phenomena. This study adopts a general qualitative approach to understand the 'meanings' made by NAPs following completion of a mentoring programme. The focus of data collection was not to collect data and compare outcomes but to learn as much as possible about the experiences of mentorship and LfL practices from NAPs who can best share their perspectives.

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016:24), a general qualitative approach involves the researcher focusing on (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. This study investigates the development of LfL practices exploring numerous ways in which NAPs experience mentoring. As this study involves the meanings that NAPs attribute to their mentoring experience, it is crucial to gather qualitative data

that consist of direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge.

Research Methods – semi-structured interviews and focus group interview

Gathering data in qualitative research can take numerous forms, including interviewing, observation and mining data from documents and artefacts (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Applying my social constructivist worldview and the qualitative interpretive approach to the study, I chose interviews as the most appropriate choice of data collection, employing two methods: semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group. This study utilises a sequential qualitative mixed-method design, where the preliminary findings of the individual interview transcripts inform the focus group schedule of questions (Morse, 2010).

In qualitative research, some, and occasionally all, of the data are collected through interviews (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter, in which one person elicits information from another. The interview's primary purpose is to find out what is 'in and on someone else's mind' (Patton, 2015:426). Interviewing participants for this study was crucial because, as a researcher, I cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people interpret the world around them. It is also appropriate to use interviews as the research is focused on past events that cannot be replicated. Moreover, Saldaña (2011:32) notes that interviews are 'an effective way of soliciting and documenting, in their own words, an individual's or group's perspectives, feelings, opinions, values, attitudes, and beliefs about their experiences in the world…'. The interview questions (appendix 2) are framed to be broad and general to capture the breadth of these responses (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Also, the closeness afforded by one-on-one interviews permits a varied and rich understanding of the issues discussed (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of the individual interviews is to acquire rich data and inform the second data collection method. The second data collection method is a focus group.

As a method of collecting data in qualitative research, a focus group is an interview on a topic with a group who have knowledge of the topic (Cohen et al., 2018). This data collection method is used to enhance and enrich the data gathered from the individual interviews. Hennink (2014:2-3) elaborates:

> Perhaps the most unique characteristic of focus group research is the interactive
> discussion through which data are generated, which leads to a different type of data

not accessible through individual interviews. During a focus group discussion,
participants share their views with others and perhaps refine their ideas in light of what
they have heard.

As the focus group questions (appendix 4) were not highly personal or sensitive, this data collection
method was appropriate to elicit feedback from participants to enrich and develop the individual
interview data. To ensure copious and rich amounts of data were gathered, attention now turns to
the sampling strategy employed in the study.

4.3   Sample selection

The sample selection depends on the questions being asked, the data being gathered, the analysis in
progress, and the resources available to the researcher (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). What is
required is an adequate number of participants to answer the research question. According to
Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), there is a quality over quantity mentality within qualitative research
where researchers prioritise getting a rich and profound picture of the lived experience of a small
number of participants rather than speaking to as many participants as possible. In deciding the
number of participants in the study, I considered the concept of saturation. Literature differs
surrounding the concept of saturation using qualitative methods. For example, Creswell (2014)
contends that saturation occurs when the researcher makes the subjective determination that new
data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories. These criteria
have different implications depending on the research methodology employed in the study. While
there is no ideal number of participants identified in the literature for qualitative research (Creswell,
2014), I was mindful that the data collected would be copious and constructive, providing useful
insights into the phenomenon in question. To reach an acceptable saturation point for the sample
selection, I employ purposeful sampling based on expected reasonable coverage of the research
question (Patton, 2015). This was achieved by seeking a minimum of ten participants for the
individual interviews and a minimum of four participants for the focus group.

Purposeful sampling and recruitment

Within qualitative research, purposeful sampling is most often utilised as a means to understand the
phenomenon and experiences of participants who will offer the researcher focused and detailed
data (Patton, 2015). It is vital to select participants who help the researcher understand the problem
and the research question (Creswell, 2014). As the focus of the research was on NAPs' perceptions
of mentoring, a decision was taken early in the design stage not to include the voice of mentors.

As this study explores the mentoring experience of NAPs, it was crucial that all participants had completed the CSL mentoring programme. To ensure a similar mentoring experience, all participants are post-primary school principals who have completed the CSL mentoring programme over one academic year, 2018/2019. I also sought to ensure the sample was representative of gender and of the different contexts that NAPs work in, specifically, school type and school size. Consideration was also given to the previous senior management experience of participants. To gain access to possible participants, the role of a gatekeeper was crucial to the research process.

Creswell (2014) emphasises the importance of the researcher gaining access to participants through a gatekeeper in their natural setting. In this regard, I contacted the NAPD director of mentoring, who, having access to CSL mentoring participants, agreed to act as a gatekeeper for this research. The gatekeeper distributed the research invitation via email (appendix 1b) in September 2019 to principals who had completed the CSL mentoring programme during the 2018/19 academic year. Potential participants opted into the study by contacting me directly via email. Confirmation of a respondent's willingness to participate in the study was established by contacting each respondent by email. When confirmation of participation was established, I provided each participant with the ethical approval letter from the university Social Research Ethics Sub Committee Ethics Committee (appendix 1a) and the research information sheet and consent form for interviews (appendix 3) via email requesting that they read the documents and sign the consent form. Each participant was made aware of the opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns either by phone or email; no participant availed of this opportunity.

Participants were identified based on the sampling criteria. The criteria for the sample required participants to be serving post-primary school principals who had completed the CSL mentoring programme during the 2018/2019 academic year. Sixteen principals responded to my email seeking participation in the study. Two respondents had not completed the mentoring programme and, as such, did not meet the criteria for the sample and were excluded. In all, fourteen respondents took part in the study: ten principals took part in the individual interviews, and four took part in the focus group. The focus group participants consisted of principals who could not participate in the individual interviews due to work and life commitments at a particular time during the year but agreed to participate in the focus group. Following identification of the focus group participants, they were sent the information sheet and consent form (appendix 5) for the focus group and requested to read the documents and sign the consent form. Participants represented different

post-primary school sectors. Overall, nine participants had previous senior management experience as a deputy principal in their current or previous schools. Of the ten principals who took part in the individual interviews, seven were male, and three were female, with the focus group consisting of two male and two female participants (table 4.1 and table 4.2). Pseudonyms are used to ensure the anonymity of participants.

Table 4.1   Participants for individual interviews

Participant	School sector	Student population	Previous senior management experience
Annette	JMB	550-600	Three years as deputy principal
Thomas	ETB	900-1000	Two years as deputy principal
Jillian	JMB	450-500	Seven years as deputy principal
John	ETB	450-500	Three years as deputy principal
Luke	JMB	150-200	None
Mark	JMB	600-650	None
Mary	ETB	250-300	Three months as deputy principal
Mathew	ETB	150-200	Four years as deputy principal
Niall	ETB	300-350	Five years as deputy principal
Tim	JMB	400-450	None

(ETB – Educational and Training Board, JMB – Joint Managerial Body)

Table 4.2   Participants for the focus group interview

Participant	School sector	Student population	Previous senior management experience
Anne	ACCS	650-700	None
Ciara	JMB	200-250	Four years as deputy principal
Conor	JMB	400-450	None
David	ETB	400-450	Two years as deputy principal

*(ETB – Educational and Training Board, JMB – Joint Managerial Body, ACCS – Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools)*

4.4   Data Collection

In this section, I outline the research stages and show how the sequential approach to the collection of data helped to scaffold the direction of the study.

Before I commenced data collection, I set up two pilot interviews (September 2019), where I sought to pilot the data collection instrument. This process, supported by my document analysis (Chapter 2) and literature review (Chapter 3), helped to refine the research questions and deepen my understanding of my interview style and approach. Data collection commenced with step one, ten individual interviews (December 2019 – March 2020), generating evidence related directly to the research questions. The dominant narratives, developing themes and topics that emerged during the interviews informed the interview protocol for the second step of data collection, the focus group (April 2020). Figure 4.2 provides an outline of the data collection process.

Figure 4.2   Process of data collection
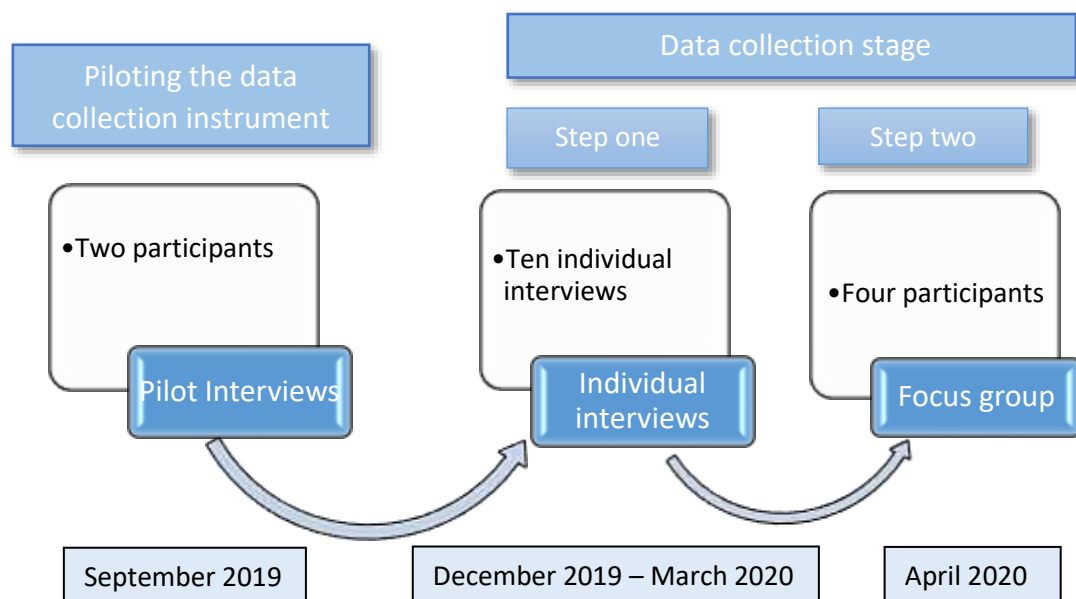
The following section provides further detail on the data collection process elaborating on the different methods employed. The rationale for the pilot interviews is explored, followed by a description of semi-structured individual interviews and the focus group interview.

4.4.1   Piloting the data collection instrument

Proponents of qualitative research suggest that the researcher should conduct pilot interviews to ensuring the use of appropriate terms, definitions and minimising a level of discomfort with

subsequent participants (Cohen et al., 2018). Before scheduling and conducting the individual interviews, pilot interviews were conducted with two NAPs known to the researcher. The literature review provided the framework for the pilot interview questions with the goal of deepening my understanding of the context of NAPs and increase 'the reliability, validity and practicability of the questions' (Cohen et al., 2018:496). The questions for the pilot interviews were deliberately open and designed to encourage the interviewee to tell his/her story. The interviewees understood that the pilot interview purpose was not for publication or data collection but to assess the interview process and clarify the questions. The pilot interviews were face to face and audio-recorded, and I relied on handwritten notes and later transcribed the interviews in full.

Numerous benefits of the pilot interviews influenced data collection in this study. During this initial stage of the research process, I realised how best to record interviews discreetly using a voice recording app on my iPad. The pilot interviews also revealed the need to clarify and expand upon some questions and review the research definition of LfL that relates to the dimensions of school vision and shared leadership. For example, the focus on building the school vision was expanded to encompass the establishment of goals. The question on shared leadership was adjusted to allow participants to describe their understanding of DL in their school context. Engaging with pilot interviews primarily provided the opportunity to test the interview questions and explore different methods as part of the qualitative research process, such as phraseology, shared language, probing, and leading questions (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). Also, the pilot interviews provided an opportunity to 'fine-tune' my interview skills.

4.4.2 Data collection: semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group

Data collection involved a two-stage data collection process comprising ten individual interviews and a focus group. The individual interviews took place over a four-month period, December 2019 – March 2020. As the individual interviews progressed, I read and reread the data capturing my reflections, tentative themes, hunches, ideas, and different topics to pursue from this initial data set. This provided the opportunity to reflect on the key issues raised and how they relate to the study's broader theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues. Although focus groups and individual interviews are independent data collection methods, their combination was advantageous for the study as rich data and complementary views of the phenomenon were generated (Morse, 2010). Each data collection method will now be explored.

Semi-structured individual interviews

The interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2014) with questions formulated from the analysis of policy documents (Chapter 2), emergent themes and topics from the literature review (Chapter 3), my own professional experiences, and reflections from the pilot interviews. The interview protocol ensured that interview questions and format provided a structure that facilitates a level of consistency and real-time responsiveness to the interviewees' answers (appendix 2). The real-time dialogue inherent in semi-structured interviews (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014) provides an opportunity for each participant to develop his/her feedback on various themes and topics raised. The study used open-ended questions allowing participants to include more information, including feelings, attitudes, and understanding of the subject (Merriman and Tisdell 2016). This supports the search for 'rich and detailed information, not for yes or no, agree or disagree responses' (Rubin and Rubin 2011:29).

Individual interviews took place between December 2019 and March 2020. The location for the interviews was agreed upon in advance with each participant. Six interviews took place in the participants' own school setting, two took place in hotels chosen by participants, and two took place online due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interestingly, I did not find any significant difference between face-to-face and online interviews. Interactive communication with direct probing was created in both settings. Furthermore, using the web camera, I found the interaction was comparable to the onsite equivalent for the presence of nonverbal and social cues. Agreeing with Cohen et al. (2018), I found that one of the benefits of online research, as opposed to face-to-face interviews, is that participants can feel an increased sense of anonymity and are more willing to offer their opinion. For example, using the same interview schedule for all individual interviews, the two online interviews lasted longer than face-to-face interviews.

The same interview protocol was used for each individual interview. The questions were made available via email to all participants in advance of the interview. The initial interview questions began with general background questions exploring each participant's educational, personal and professional experiences related to their current role as a school leader. Next, open-ended questions focused on mentoring experiences that focused on the key LfL dimensions highlighted in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. Each face-to-face interview session was recorded digitally using an IOS voice recording app (RecordPad V 7.20). The recording app was uploaded to my iPad, providing easy access to the recordings. For the two online interviews, I used Microsoft Teams and

recorded the interviews using the inbuilt recording app with the agreement of both participants. The ethical framework (section 4.7) further explores issues around consent, data handling and storage. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim. Agreeing with Merriman and Tisdell (2016), I found it crucial to consider pauses and other cues offered by the interviewee as markers for important events in the interview. These cues were acknowledged in the transcription process, providing extra insights that helped elucidate the data.

Furthermore, interview notes using transcription margins allowed space for explanatory and reflection comments to support this process. To assist in this data collection phase, I utilised a field log, providing a detailed account of how I spent my time interviewing and in the transcription phase. Using these strategies, the dominant discussions and thoughts that were evident during this phase of data collection fed into later interviews and the formulation of questions for the second stage of data collection, the focus group.

Focus group interview

The second stage of data collection involved a focus group interview. Compared to more conventional data collection methods such as interviews and surveys, focus group interviews offer an opportunity to explore issues that might not be well understood or have limited research available (Cohen et al., 2018). The goal for the focus group was to continue collecting data; however, a crucial part at this stage of data collection was bringing forward the different ideas, themes, and topics that developed from the individual interviews. These preliminary themes and dominant views were used to inform the focus group questions (appendix 4) to explore further possible answers to the research questions.

Focus groups are a form of group interview in which reliance is placed in the interaction within the group, which discusses a topic provided by the researcher. This interaction provides the data; hence, the group dynamics are important (Cohen et al., 2018). Adding a note of caution, Merriman and Tisdell (2016) suggest that a limitation of focus groups is the possibility that participants censor or conform to a dominant voice or groupthink. To mitigate this, I ensured, as moderator, that no one voice dominated the discussion, and different opinions were given equal consideration and importance in the discussion.

The focus group was scheduled to occur in early March 2020 as a face-to-face meeting; however, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 necessitated a virtual meeting. Following

phone conversations with each participant, an agreement was reached that the focus group would take place via a Microsoft Teams meeting using my university Microsoft 365 account. It was also agreed to use the video option to enable participants to see each other and the researcher/moderator. All participants expressed confidence using video conferencing software. It was agreed with each participant that the audio of the focus group interview would be recorded and transcribed (section 4.7). Like the online individual interviews, I noted a sense of anonymity with focus group participants and a willingness to offer opinions. Furthermore, I found the potential to open up the conversation resulted in productive discussions informing developing themes from the individual interviews.

An essential aspect of the research design was the combination of data at the end of both stages of data collection. The following section explores and details the data analysis procedure employed in this study.

4.5   Data analysis

Agreeing with Braun and Clarke (2019:3), I view qualitative research as a journey, where researchers are always 'thinking, reflecting, learning and evolving'. This section outlines the approach taken to analyse the data, including the background to data analysis, an overview of reflective thematic analysis and the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013).

4.5.1   Background to the analysis of the data

Qualitative data analysis is not a straightforward process. While qualitative data eventually turns into findings, 'there is no simple formula or recipe for this' (Patton, 2002:432). In qualitative research, data analysis does not necessarily have to begin after collection is finished; any interaction with participants is considered the beginning of the gathering process, which continues throughout the entire study (Creswell, 2014). For this sequential qualitative study, data analysis began when contact was made with the first individual interview participant. This analysis took the form of noting particular responses and specific areas of growing interest that I may wish to explore further in the upcoming interviews. The ongoing collection of data from individual interviews identified dominant topics, issues, themes and emerging narratives that informed later interviews and the questions that were utilised for the focus group.

Approaches for analysing qualitative data are typically structured as processes with interconnected phases (Marshall and Rossman, 2016; Creswell, 2014). The phases may be concurrent and repetitive

and can be viewed as a spiral rather than a linear process. Creswell (2013) contends that qualitative data analysis can be expressed in three general phases, (1) arranging and organising the data, (2) coding the data to find themes, and (3) discussing and describing the data. There are numerous ways to analyse data. I chose an analytical process best aligned with my data collection methods and research design. My approach attempts to eliminate confusion by pointing out that 'qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work that the investigator does at each of the stages' (Smith and Osborn, 2003:67). Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2013) reflective thematic analysis framework, this study applies a systematic manner to data analysis.

4.5.2   Reflective thematic analysis

Reflective thematic analysis identifies patterns or themes in the interview data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013). This approach to data analysis is arguably the most influential in the social sciences because it offers such a clear and usable framework for doing thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This study employs the updated version of the model (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This updated model attempts to deal with a long-held critique of their work, especially in terms of phase three, which had previously been labelled as 'Search for themes'. Previously this has come to imply the themes were in the data and the role of the researcher was simply to find them. Braun and Clarke (2013) now suggest the themes are created by the researcher and are outputs of the coding exercise. In other words, the generation of themes is an interpretive process. This model was appropriate for this study given the social constructivist and interpretative approach of the research design (section 4.2.2).

As a relatively unfamiliar researcher with qualitative methods, I found that thematic analysis was quickly grasped as there are few prescriptions and procedures. Furthermore, another advantage, particularly from the perspective of educational leadership, is that reflective thematic analysis is a method rather than a methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Unlike other qualitative methods, it is not tied to a particular ontology or epistemology. Therefore, the method is flexible and accessible to different research designs. However, Braun and Clarke (2013) note a common pitfall of using the main interview questions as the themes as this may reflect the fact that the data has been generalised and arranged rather than analysed. Also, the flexibility of reflective thematic analysis can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes from research data (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Acknowledging these possible 'pitfalls', I kept a detailed record of my intuitions, suspicions and feelings about the interviews and the data analysis throughout the study.

By noting these considerations using a reflective journal, an attempt is made to reduce any biasing effect they might have on data analysis (section 4.6). In addition, the reflective journal provided ample opportunities to 'step back' and reflect on my decisions. I wrote observational comments and memos, reflecting feelings and thoughts; diligence in writing these memos and notes following the interviews allowed for deeper engagement with the data, particularly in relation to themes such as trust and emotional awareness.

Braun and Clarke (2013) distinguish between a top-down or theoretical thematic analysis that is driven by the specific research question(s) and/or the analyst's focus, and a bottom-up or inductive one that is more driven by the data. For this study, the research questions were open-ended, where I was interested in participants' own reflections of their experiences and points of view. The study's analysis was driven by a bottom-up approach focusing on the data collected, reflecting an inductive method.

Overall, I found reflective thematic analysis to be an appropriate method for this study, exploring different research participants' perspectives, uncovering similarities and differences, and generating unexpected insights (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun and Clarke (2013) describe a flexible six-step phase process model characterised by its foregrounding in the researcher's subjectivity, see figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3   **The six steps in reflective thematic analysis**
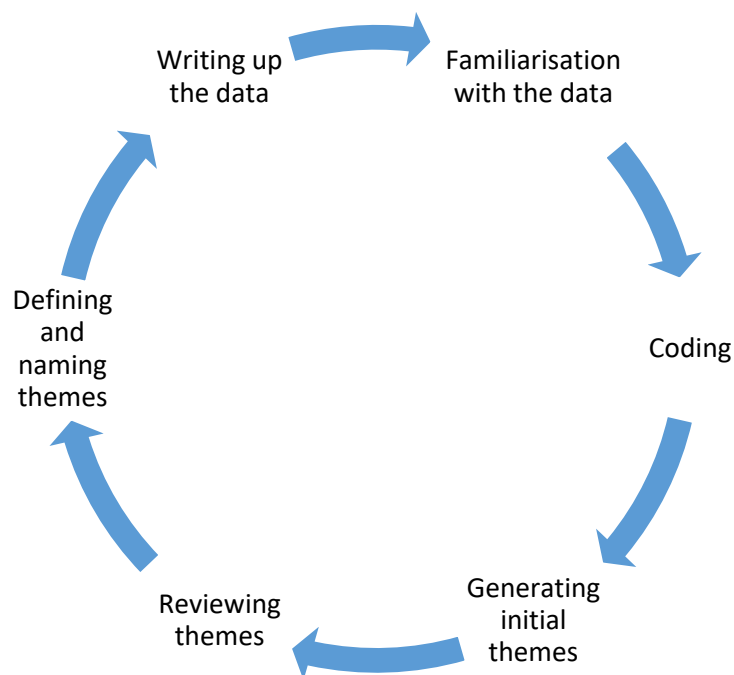
(Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2013)

This thematic approach model aims to identify patterns of meaning across a dataset that answer the research question(s) being addressed. Patterns are identified through a rigorous process of data familiarisation, data coding, and theme development and revision. Although these phases are sequential, and each build on the previous, analysis is typically a recursive process, with movement back and forth between different phases (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Therefore, I did not use these steps as rules to be rigidly followed; instead, as a series of conceptual 'instruments' that guided my data analysis to facilitate a rigorous process of data interrogation that remained loyal to my theoretical framework and research questions.

I undertook a preliminary analysis of the transcripts to identify the dominant narratives and prevailing issues from individual interview data. I used the first step of reflective thematic analysis for this process: familiarisation with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This process identified specific topics that were not on my research radar from the beginning of the data collection process. These topics were brought to the focus group for further discussion and exploration (appendix 4) with the goal of enhancing the depth and scope of my data analysis. Following the collection of data from both sources, individual interviews, and the focus group I employed the six-step reflective thematic approach (Braun and Clarke, 2013). What follows is an overview of the process of data analysis.

4.5.3   Process of data analysis

This section details the data analysis procedure using each of the six steps of reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

As noted in section 4.5.2, this step was initially used for the preliminary analysis of individual interviews to inform the interview protocol for the focus group. Following the completion of data collection, I commenced the **first step** of the analysis process to familiarise and immerse myself in the data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This involves listening to the audio recordings, transcribing, reading and rereading the transcripts, and reviewing interview notes and reflections. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, I read the entire data set (individual interviews and focus group interview) before beginning coding. The focus at this stage of data analysis was to immerse myself in the data, repeatedly reading the transcripts, searching for meanings and patterns (Nowell et al., 2017). At this initial stage, one emerging view was the importance of 'sharing learning experiences' as a primary conduit for mentorship. For example, one participant spoke of sharing learning experiences as 'the foundation of an excellent mentoring experience'. Another referred to

honest and open discussions where 'sharing experiences opened up new ways of thinking and alternative solutions to problems'. Several interview participants identified the sharing of learning experiences as crucial to effective mentoring conversations that supported their leadership practices. This ongoing process of immersion in the data led to the transition to coding and developing themes.

The **second step** began once I had read and familiarised myself with the data, formed ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This phase involved generating succinct labels (codes) that identify essential features of the data that may be relevant to answering the research questions. It involved coding the entire dataset, collating all the codes and all relevant data extracts together for later stages of analysis (Saldaña, 2013). This process focused on specific characteristics of the data, moving from unstructured data to the development of ideas about what is going on in the data. To elaborate further, I read the first transcript noting comments, observations and queries in the margins of the transcript. These comments were noted next to the sections of data that I found potentially relevant or essential to my study. As I was open to anything possible at this point, this form of coding is often referred to as 'Open Coding' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Moving to my next interview transcript, I scanned it in the same way as just outlined, keeping in mind the list of codes that I extracted from the first transcript and checking to see if they were evident in the interview transcript. I did not have pre-set codes but developed and modified existing codes and created new codes as I worked through the coding process for each transcript. Despite this, I had initial ideas about creating codes following from the first stage in the process. For example, frequent references to participant and mentor motivation were issues that arose and were very relevant to my research questions. Working systematically through each interview transcript and the focus group transcript, I gave full and equal attention to each data item seeking interesting aspects in the data that address the research questions.

During this stage of code development, I utilised computer-assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) to organise data and facilitate analysis. However, Bogdan and Biklen (2011:187) point out that 'assisted' is the operative word here because 'the computer programme only helps as an organising or categorising tool and does not do the analysis for the researcher'. For this study, I used qualitative software (MAXQDA) to support data analysis, allowing codes to be assigned to pieces of data and then retrieving all the data under a particular code. The software identified several

additional codes; however, I was uneasy about putting a computer between the researcher and the data, as this may cause 'an uncomfortable distance between the researcher and his or her information' (Creswell, 2013:202). Consequently, I found an acceptable balance by combining hand-coding with the codes identified using the functionality of MAXQDA to support the organisation and management of the data.

The **third step** commenced when the data had been initially coded, collated, and a list of the codes was developed. This stage involved collating all the relevant coded extracts to identify possible themes that resonated with the research question. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), there is no hard and fast rule regarding what makes a theme. For this study, I classified themes based on their significance. Examining the codes, it became evident that some were similar and fitted together into a theme. For example, I had several codes relating to the importance of 'trust' within the mentoring dyad. I collated these into an initial theme called 'supportive relationships'. This phase involves checking the themes against the dataset to determine if they told a convincing story of the data and answered the research questions. Table 4.3 shows some of the study's preliminary themes and the codes associated with them.

Table 4.3   **Initial themes and associated codes**

Theme: Effective communication with the mentor	Theme: Supportive relationships	Theme: Emotional awareness
Codes	Codes	Codes
• Face-to-face meetings with mentor	• Matching of mentor with the mentee	• Difficult discussions with teachers
• Quick response to email queries	• Trust	• Empathy with others
• Using online platforms	• Similar educational philosophy	• Communication
• Reciprocal process	• Developing confidence	• Responding to parental concerns
• Frequency of meetings	• Knowledge of mentor	• Inclusiveness
• Finding the time	• Feedback	• Listening to others

Most codes were associated with one theme; however, some were associated with more than one theme. When this occurred, I used a 'miscellaneous' theme to identify and organise these codes.

During the **fourth step**, I reviewed, modified and developed the previous stage's preliminary themes. The validity of the themes was considered to determine whether they accurately reflect the meaning in the dataset as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2013). To achieve this, I gathered all the data that was relevant to each theme. The functionality of MAXQDA allowed for quick and easy identification, selection, and printing of data related to each theme. I read and reread the data from each segment and considered whether the data supported the theme. During this phase, themes were refined, which involved them being split, combined, or discarded (Marshall and Rossman, 2016). Reducing the potential themes by grouping similar responses and experiences was essential in managing the data. For example, the preliminary theme of 'effective communication with the mentor' (table 4.3) was eventually discarded as there was not sufficient data to support it, and it overlapped with other similar themes.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006:91) suggestion, I created a visual 'thematic map' to adequately capture 'the contours of the coded data' (2006:91), develop themes and highlight the relationship between developing themes. For example, figure 4.4 illustrates the relationships between the data and the developing theme of 'emotional awareness'.

Figure 4.4   **Thematic map showing the relationship between themes**
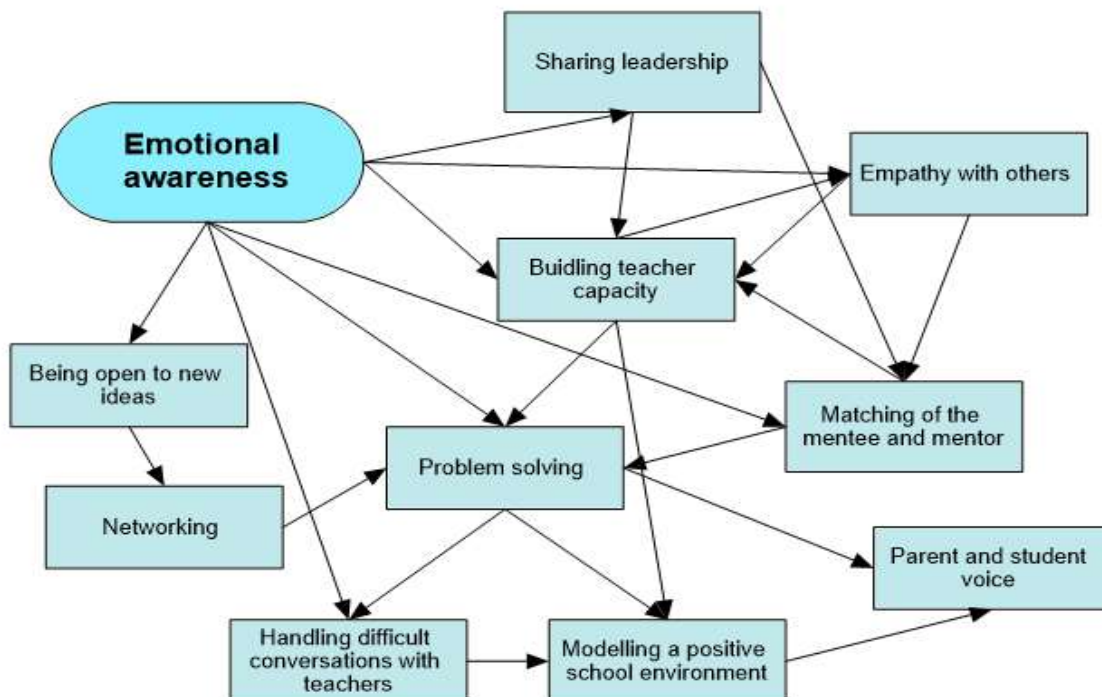
The **fifth step** completed the refinement of the themes. King (2004) contends that it is possible to modify and refine definitions of themes forever, and one of the most important decisions for researchers is to know when to stop the process of development. This focus is to clearly define what the themes are and are not (Braun and Clarke, 2013). For each theme, a detailed analysis supports the creation of the 'story' that each individual theme tells in relation to the research questions. Furthermore, I was aware of the possible similarities between themes, ensuring there was not too much overlap between them. The **final step** involved writing up the findings from a set of fully worked-out themes (Chapter five).

Data analysis requires that the findings be accurate from the standpoint of both the researcher and the reader (Creswell, 2014) and the instruments used are sound and valid (Cohen et al., 2018). Validity and reliability are crucial elements of all research and are the focus of the following section.

4.6 Validity and reliability

All research is concerned with producing reliable and valid data knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:237). Validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful framing of the study and the way in which data is collected, analysed, interpreted, and presented. The difficulty is the variety of qualitative research that results in differences in validity and reliability criteria. For example, Creswell (2013) applies somewhat different criteria for how 'good' a narrative study is compared to other methodological approaches. Likewise, Lichtman (2013:294) offers her own 'personal criteria' for qualitative research, including being explicit about the researcher's role, relationship to participants, the relevance of the research and making a convincing presentation of the findings. This ongoing theoretical debate has some way to go before consensus is reached; however, I agree with Stake (2005:455), who contends that knowledge acquired from research 'faces a hazardous passage from writing to reading' and the writer must 'seek ways of safeguarding the trip'. This section seeks to outline the procedures I undertook to 'safeguard the trip' and convey the steps I undertook during the study to account for validity and reliability.

4.6.1 Validity

The critical question for qualitative researchers is whether the results are consistent with the data collected (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016:251). When validity is achieved, it is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher and the reader (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As Cohen et al.

(2018:245) argue, 'if research is invalid, then it is worthless'. One of the central assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a rigid or fixed phenomenon waiting to be revealed (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Validity is never something that can be proven or taken for granted. It must be assessed in relation to the purposes and circumstances of the research (Merriman and Tisdell, 2016). Hence, qualitative researchers cannot claim to capture 'truth' or 'reality'; however, the researcher can take steps to increase the validity and credibility of the findings.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest specific strategies researchers can employ to address validity concerns. These strategies include triangulation, member checking, reflexivity, adequate engagement with the data and peer review (pp.238-239). The following paragraphs detail how these strategies support the validity of this study.

Triangulation

Probably the best-known strategy to shore up the validity of a study is triangulation (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation must have at least two sets of data that describe the phenomenon in question (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). In essence, triangulation is using multiple sources, comparing and cross-checking data at different times. To support a complete picture for this study, I use four sources to support triangulation: analysis of policy documents (Chapter 2), the theoretical framework that informs the research design (Chapter 3), individual interview data, and focus group data. Furthermore, the two sets of empirical data in this study, while providing similar perspectives, also offer different viewpoints on the same topic. When combined, the two sets of data provide a more cohesive, fuller picture of developing themes. This strategy also enabled triangulation with the study's theoretical framework by examining evidence from these data sources to build a coherent justification for developing themes. As themes developed, by converging these multiple sources of data, the process adds to this study's validity. Triangulation enhanced the credibility of the research by countering the concern that the findings were 'an artefact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias' (Patton, 2015:674).

Member checking

A second strategy employed in this study was member checking. This method involves 'taking ideas back to the research participants for their confirmation' (Charmaz, 2006:111). The goal of member checking is to ensure that the interpretations of the data accurately reflect the participants' views. Following the interviews and focus group, participants were emailed a copy of the transcript and

invited to read and identify any text in the transcript they felt was transcribed incorrectly or should be reframed differently. All participants acknowledged receipt of the transcript, and none requested any changes. At the initial stages of writing up the findings chapter, three participants (two interview participants and one focus group participant) were emailed a section of the account relating to his/her contribution and asked to review interpreted material. These participants were selected due to their availability and their willingness to provide feedback. As the data analysis process continued, I again contacted these three participants with an overview of several identified themes as a measure to ensure validity and reliability (Merriam, 2009).

The validation of the conversations allowed participants to garner whether the retelling of their stories was devalued or if the intent of their telling was lost in the analysis of the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). However, I was aware of the possible drawback of this process where participants may misinterpret or not read the inferences carefully and request inappropriate or inaccurate changes (Cohan et al., 2018). For example, one participant considered that his response in relation to his mentor promoting the school vision was not 'in tune with the findings'. In response, I had to expound on the rationale for this finding (by email) which the participant then accepted. Another participant felt their comments concerning their motivation to participate in the mentoring programme was 'overemphasised' in the findings. Following a phone call conversation explaining how the quote supported a central theme the participant expressed satisfaction with the developing narrative. This process ensured that my interpretations of the data accurately reflect participants' views. Acknowledging these challenges, I found member checking a vital quality control strategy to guard against researcher bias and incorrect data interpretations.

Reflexivity

I practised reflexivity by identifying myself within the research (Cohen et al., 2018). As mentioned earlier in this chapter (section 4.2.1), this process ensured that I was aware of my biases and assumptions from the study's outset and made them known to the reader. As a school principal, I have formed strong beliefs regarding the influence of school leaders on students' learning and the need for support and continuing professional development for school principals. As a researcher, I cannot entirely disregard such beliefs formed from life experiences. The process I used to become aware of my personal prejudices, viewpoints and assumptions is called *epoché* (a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgement). 'In the epoché, the everyday understandings, judgements, and knowings are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited' (Moustakas, 1994:33). To accomplish this, I used memos and a reflective journal throughout data collection and analysis as a means of

examining and reflecting upon my engagement with the data (see section 4.5.2). This provided opportunities to reflect and comment on my feelings about the research process. For example, I was able to unearth forgotten personal experiences such as isolation that influenced my own leadership practices, ensuring that these feelings did not alter or change the process of data collection or analysis. Figure 4.5 provides a worked example of bracketing and illustrates how I was able to ascertain this feeling of isolation as a NAP.

Figure 4.5 A worked example of bracketing
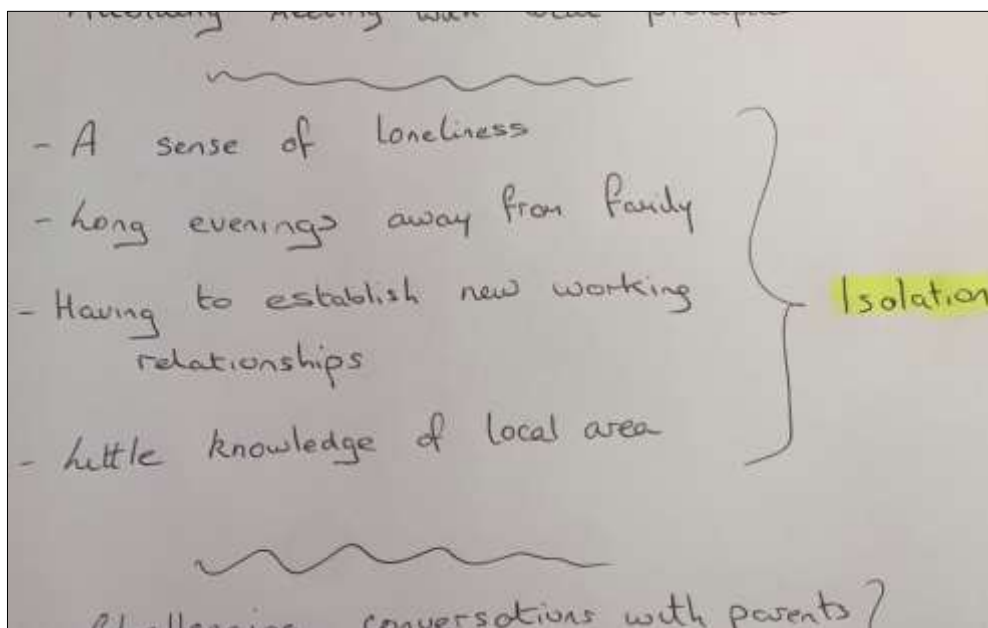
As part of this process, I was able to identify and put aside personal experiences and empathies (such as my sense of isolation as a NAP) to communicate the experiences of participants (Chan et al., 2013). Supporting Maxwell (2013:432), it was not my intention to eliminate this influence but rather 'to understand it and use it productively'. Hence, rather than attempting to stifle, for example, my beliefs about the importance of mentoring for NAPs in the pursuit of objectivity, my predispositions and intuitions promoted extensive engagement with the data.

Adequate engagement with the data

I interpret this strategy as spending adequate time looking for variation in the datasets. Patton (2015) argues that credibility in research hinges partly on the researcher's credibility, and one method of responding to this issue is for the researcher to 'look for data that support alternative explanations' (p.653). For example, the data from the individual interviews produced conflicting

responses from some participants about support and guidance provided by mentors. Patton (2015:654) contends that often there is no clear cut 'yes' or 'no' answer to whether the data supports an alternative explanation. This required assessing the weight of the evidence and looking for those patterns and conclusions that fit the preponderance of data. Supporting Merriman and Tisdell (2016:249), I purposefully sought data that went against or at least challenged emerging findings. Indeed, real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce. Presenting this contrary evidence, it can be argued, ensures that the study becomes more realistic and, therefore, more valid.

Peer review

To enhance the accuracy of the study process and findings, I sought the support of a colleague principal who previously completed a doctoral programme. He acted as 'peer debriefer' who reviewed draft chapters and interrogated my methodological approach and theoretical framework, providing an outsider's opinion on the progress of developing discussions and findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This peer examination involved scanning the raw data and assessing whether the findings were plausible based on the data. This strategy espoused an interpretation beyond the researcher and, as such, supported the validity of the study. Allowing for sufficient time for my 'peer debriefer' to review drafts and provide feedback was balanced with the opportunity afforded by this process to reflect more on creating themes during the early stages of data analysis and making judgments about the study's relative quality and merit.

4.6.2   Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. However, reliability can be problematic in the social sciences because human behaviour is fluid and never static. Merriman and Tisdell (2016) reconceptualize reliability in qualitative research as the quest for consistency and dependability rather than replicating the study. Therefore, the question is not whether findings will be found again, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected. For this study, I use a two-step approach to ensure reliability. The first step is to check each transcript to ensure that it did not contain any apparent mistakes made during transcription (Creswell, 2018), as noted above in section 4.6.1. The second step to support the reliability of this study is an audit trail.

An audit trail is when a qualitative researcher details the data collection process, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. For this process, I recorded what topics were unique and exciting during the data collection, noting my thoughts about coding, providing a rationale for why I merged codes and explained what the themes mean. Merriman and Tisdell (2016) state that a study and its

findings are auditable when another researcher can follow the decision trail. The audit trail provides readers with evidence of the decisions and choices made regarding theoretical and methodological issues throughout the study (Cohen et al., 2018). Supporting Creswell (2014), I sought to ensure that another researcher with the same data, perspective, and situation could arrive at the same or comparable, but not contradictory, conclusions.

To a large extent, a study's validity and reliability depend upon the researcher's ethical standards. The ethical framework of this study will now be addressed.

4.7 Ethical framework

Ethics in research concerns what researchers ought and ought not to do during the research process (Cohan et al., 2018:111). Supports and structures such as codes of practice, ethical guidelines and ethics committees raise issues for consideration and outline what is and what is not acceptable in academic research. Before the commencement of data collection, ethical approval was sought and received from the Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Committee (appendix 1a). The study's ethical framework was guided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) ethical guidelines for educational research while adhering to the Maynooth University Ethics Policy (MU, 2019) and the Research Integrity Policy of Maynooth University (MU, 2021). On reflection, ethical considerations are rarely straightforward as rule-following may suggest; instead, it is for the individual to take responsibility for the decisions that he/she takes on ethical matters and the actions associated with those decisions (Cohen et al., 2018).

I was aware that all choices made in the design of this research needed to address ethical considerations. This extends to the very nature and definition of the purpose of the research to the context in which the research takes place, the methods chosen, the choice of participants and the way research findings are used (Cohen et al., 2018). Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018:88) contend the data collection process is not limited to discussions of source and technique; ethical consideration is necessary each step of the way, including during piloting, relationship development, and information storage. In practice, these considerations dictated that I guaranteed that no harm could come to the participants because of their participation. Some issues for ethical consideration unique to the study include, but were not limited to, informed consent procedures, confidentiality, protecting participants from distress/harm, and data storage and usage. Each issue is explored below.

Informed consent procedures

To avoid any allegation of dishonesty, the study's nature and purpose was clearly defined and communicated to all participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This helped to ensure that participants and the researcher were of one mind when it came to the research goals. To support this process, I held informal conversations by phone with participants to establish trust and respect. This provided the opportunity to respond to any potential concerns or issues relating to the information sheet and consent forms (appendix 3, appendix 5). Participation in this study was voluntary, each participant could withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or withdraw their information up until the research findings were anonymised. This was clearly outlined in the information sheet and consent forms and confirmed by phone upon receipt of signed consent forms.

With an awareness that I was responsible for protecting participants from harm, I addressed potential concerns around privacy, both the participants themselves and their information. Participants were given the option to opt-out of the audio recording, with detailed notetaking in its place; however, no one opted out. I also provided the interview questions to participants before the interviews/focus group. All signed the consent form before participation, and all were professionals with the capacity to give informed consent.

Confidentiality

Another ethical issue revolves around confidentiality. The nature of this study necessitates one-on-one interactions with NAPs, who agree to share information about their professional beliefs and experiences. Confidentiality refers to a condition in which the researcher knows the identity of a research subject but takes steps to protect that identity from being discovered by others (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:95). In this research, maintaining confidentiality was a key measure to ensure the protection of private information.

Although participants inevitably wove their personal narratives into their responses, the data collected were, for the most part, related to their professional role rather than of a personal nature. I adhered strictly to the need for anonymity, using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants. The key linking the interviewees to pseudonyms and all recorded data was stored securely on my personal computer using a password-protected Word document. I also ensured reported data did not include information that could identify people, individual schools or geographical areas.

Protecting participants from stress/harm

The study involves the voluntary sharing of experiences and understandings on the part of non-vulnerable adults who were made aware of the study's context and ethical provisions. The individual interviews had the potential to surface painful memories and hence a return to the feelings associated with a particular event or situation. While acknowledging such concerns for participants, Merriman and Tisdell (2016) claim that painful and stressful encounters can be harnessed to deepen analysis and strengthen the impact of research findings on practice. It was not my intention to seek such outcomes, and I was ready to suspend or terminate any interview where distress emerged on the participants part. Also, piloting was used as an opportunity to reduce the risk of stress for participants. In response to these concerns, details of support services were collated before data collection commenced and were available for participants as resources for assistance in dealing with problems that may have surfaced during the interviews.

The study provided participants with opportunities to explore and reflect on what they have learned following their mentoring experience, what they do as school principals and how their leadership skills may have developed following mentoring. During data collection, I believed that participants enjoyed sharing their knowledge, opinions, and experiences gaining valuable expertise in the process. This brought into focus the task to 'neither judge or be a therapist nor a cold slab of granite unresponsive to learning about distress and pain that may be reported or re-experienced during an interview' (Patton, 2015:495).

The onset of the COVID 19 pandemic necessitated a switch to online platforms for some individual interviews and the focus group. This was done to abide by health regulations ensuring the safety of participants. Also, no recompense or inducement of any kind was offered or provided to participants.

Data storage and usage

Interview and focus group recordings and transcripts were maintained on my university Microsoft 365 account. These have restricted access, and the data was encrypted, accessible only by the researcher. Hard copy information sheets were held securely in a locked cabinet. The key to pseudonyms and codes was held on a separate computer in a separate location to the raw data. Data collected on the mobile device (iPad) was compliant with data protection law, Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy (MU, 2019) and Research Integrity Policy (MU, 2021). Data were removed from the mobile device as soon as it was practicable and stored on a Maynooth University

server, accessible from my personal computer. Data will be stored in a safe, secure and accessible form and held for ten years to allow (if necessary) for future reassessment or verification of the data from primary sources. Following this ten-year period, I will destroy all data, including all manual data (transcripts, reflective journal, notebooks and memos) by shredding and electronic data will be reformatted.

4.8   Conclusion

The goal of social research is to understand better and explore the complexity of people's lives. Having an interest in mentoring on the development of LfL practices of NAPs led me to ask researchable questions best approached through a qualitative research design. It follows that the researcher must develop a clear understanding of the assumptions and characteristics that underpin this type of research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). As this study employs a sequential approach to data collection, all research design elements needed to be well-structured, consistent, and cautiously designed. This chapter has described an overview of the research design and methods used to answer this study's research questions.

This chapter located the study within the interpretivism/constructivist paradigm and showed how the data collection technique supported an inductive approach to data analysis. While arguing the case for a general qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews and a focus group as data collection methods, the chapter briefly outlined some of the advantages and challenges of taking this approach. The approach to data analysis was outlined, describing the six steps of reflective thematic analyses. This chapter also addresses issues relating to validity, reliability, and ethics. The next chapter presents the findings of this study.

Chapter 5
Findings

5.1   Introduction

The intent of this general qualitative study is to explore the impact of mentoring on the development of LfL practices of NAPs. Research has documented the importance of school leadership, having a significant effect on the features of school organisations which positively influences the quality of teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2019; Robinson, 2011; Timperley, 2011). To this end, when mentoring is used as professional development, there is a significant positive effect on fostering a novice principal's capacity as a leader of learning (Gumus and Bellibas, 2016; Clayton et al., 2013; Daresh, 2004). The research question defined and guided the process as one that is exploratory to answer the following question: *how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?* As outlined in Chapter One, my inquiry and reflection led to the development of two sub-questions linked to the overall research question. Question one provides an open dialogue to explore NAPs' mentoring experiences; question two relates directly to principals' leadership practices.

Research sub-questions

1.   What are the perspectives of NAPs engaging in a formal mentoring programme?

2.   How has participants' professional practice been influenced by their mentoring experience?

As outlined in Chapter Four, the dominant narratives were identified following a preliminary analysis of the individual interviews. These prevailing views informed the interview protocol for the focus group (appendix 4). Data analysis commenced following the collection of data from the individual interviews and the focus group. Reflective thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was employed as an iterative process to go from unorganised data to more central themes in the data.

In this chapter, findings are organised under four themes, and these are further broken down into issues in some subthemes. The findings are congruent with the interpretive/constructivist paradigm (section 4.2.2) and are situated against the theoretical framework (section 3.5) for discussion purposes. Table 5.1 provides the reader with an overview of the themes and associated subthemes.

Table 5.1   Themes and associated subthemes

Theme 1: Supportive relationships	Theme 2: Sharing learning experiences	Theme 3: Emotional awareness	Theme 4: Mentee motivation
Subthemes	Subthemes	Subthemes	Subthemes
• Developing trust. • Matching of the mentor and mentee.	• Focusing on teaching and learning. • Supporting the professional development of teachers.	• Being open. • Communicating effectively. • Being situationally aware.	• Mentee expectations. • Perceived motivation of mentors. • Protecting mentoring time.

This chapter is divided into sections that explore each theme and further divided into subthemes identifying key issues. Data from the individual interviews is presented within each section, followed by data from the focus group. Throughout the chapter, I share quotes from the 14 participants, ten individual interviews and four focus group participants. The quotes used were of varied length and provide the reader with key pieces of data that share their experiences and perceptions. The chapter concludes with an overview of the findings revealing connections between the themes and the research questions.

5.2   Theme 1: Supportive relationships

A supportive relationship is crucial for successful mentoring (Daresh, 2007; Zachary, 2000; Kram, 1985). Acknowledging that no two relationships are the same, successful mentoring relationships have some common characteristics, including respect, empathy and trust (Kram, 1985; Chun et al., 2010). Similarly, the requirement for open, honest communication grounded in mutual trust is fundamental, and without which, a mentoring relationship may lack real meaning for participants. Participants in the study acknowledge the critical influence of a supportive relationship during the mentoring process. From the data, two subthemes developed capturing participants' actual experiences and their perceived impact of supportive relationships on the development of LfL practices, namely the development of trust and matching of the mentor with the mentee. Each of these subthemes will now be explored.

5.2.1   Developing trust

Trust is defined as the willingness to be vulnerable, to take risks (Young et el., 2005) or more precisely, 'the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions and decisions of another' (McAllister, 1995:25). In this regard, trust can be especially

beneficial for mentoring interactions as mentees have to share their judgments and feelings with their mentor (Kram, 1985; Young et al., 2005). Analysis of the data suggests that trust is crucial for successful mentoring. To frame this discussion, two key issues are identified, namely: early mentoring conversations and establishing confidence.

The data indicate that **early mentoring conversations** significantly impact mentoring relationships and the development of trust between the mentor and mentee. For most participants, the mentoring process did not commence immediately following their appointment as principal, rather a few weeks or a few months later in some cases. In this context, it is not surprising that several participants emphasise mentor support that centred around immediate concerns such as administrative and organisational issues rather than in-depth pedagogical conversations that necessitate a developed sense of trust between the mentee and mentor. As one participant put it, 'I wanted to hit the ground running…but quickly realised that I had to manoeuvre carefully and slowly between the different admin requirements of the role'. The same participant recalls that her mentor provided 'guidance and clarity' to pressing issues without the prerequisite for 'trust to be embedded in the relationship' (Annette). This view is echoed by another participant who considers initial conversations with his mentor as a source of 'quick answers' responding to day-to-day matters:

> During those early days, I had a growing list of questions. My mentor was a
> fantastic resource for me during these first few weeks (Thomas).

Echoing Oplatka and Lapidot (2017), this early-stage support was generally focused on administrative issues, particularly school management systems, timetabling, staff allocations, and data returns required by the DE. The data indicate that these early conversations took place before a trusting relationship was established within the mentoring dyad. These initial conversations were referred to as 'safe discussions' (Mathew) and 'a straightforward question and answer session' (Tim). Referring to these 'early-stage' conversations with his mentor, Mathew contends that, upon appointment, one of his immediate concerns was timetabling, noting that his mentor was helpful in providing 'invaluable insights and good tips' on how to use management software. Likewise, Niall praises his mentor, who provided a detailed checklist for the commencement of the school year. As mentoring relationships grew, participants refer to the developing sense of trust with their mentors leading to a deeper relationship where more could be achieved.

One concern expressed by two interview participants reference an absence of trust in the mentoring relationship. When this view was expressed, participants comment that the mentoring relationship did not flourish, and support was not as impactful as it may have been. However, while NAPs need support and encouragement to build their capacity as school leaders, the findings concur with Clayton et al. (2013) who suggest that trust is a crucial element in effective mentoring relationships.

Closely aligned with these initial mentoring conversations is the second key issue identified in the data, that of **establishing confidence** within the mentoring relationship. After one or two meetings, interviewees express the view that trust and confidentiality were established with their mentor. Mentoring conversations notably shifted from day-to-day management and administrative topics towards more in-depth discussions about building organisational conditions that focus on teaching and learning. Expanding further, the following two quotes reveal the weight that participants place on establishing confidence during the mentoring process:

> After a short time, we developed a trusting rapport that increased confidence to allow for more in-depth conversations exploring those deeper contextual issues focusing on improving teaching and learning (Mary).

> When I knew I could trust my mentor our conversations quickly moved to the core business of leadership, finding ways to enhance the teaching and learning in my school (Jillian).

A basic tenet underpinning the CSL mentoring programme is the importance of confidentiality between the mentor and mentee (CSL, 2018). The data show that many mentors revealed their professional experiences, including achievements and perceived failures that ultimately fostered confidentiality and a growing sense of trust. These findings align with Daresh (2004) who views confidentiality as an enabler of a trusting relationship. This growing sense of confidence experienced by mentees has a positive influence on mentoring conversations, as Mathew notes:

> My mentor provided much detail about their strengths and weaknesses…he invited me to discuss any problems I encountered, and I had no difficulty in opening up to him as he had years of experience, and I trusted his advice (Mathew).

Conversely, some participants identify a limited sense of trust and confidence as a source of weakness in the mentoring relationship. Supporting Daresh (2004), who contends that negatives are often reported in mentoring relationships, the data reveal that mentoring has emotional elements and can be prone to disappointments like any other relationship. For example, Mark recalls his feelings during the first conversation with his mentor, noting, 'My mentor was very informed and caring, but I never really developed a sense of trust partly because we never got to know each other very well'. Similarly, Tim suggests that a lack of trust in his mentoring relationship emanated from a long delay in meeting up with his mentor recalling, 'when we did eventually meet up, the academic year was up and running for months, and we just didn't have the energy or commitment to make it work'. However, for most participants, a strong sense of trust and confidence was evident as the mentoring relationship progressed.

These observations highlight the importance of trust and confidence and the corresponding influence on mentoring conversations (Searby, 2014). The data indicate specific characteristics on the part of mentors that help in developing trust and confidence. Some participants refer to the confidential nature of their mentoring conversations (Annette, John, Mathew) and knowing the mentor wanted to be a support (Niall, Annette). Also, a common theme amongst participants is that trust and confidence encourage mentor feedback and mentee reflection.

Several participants reference the types of questions posed by their mentor, noting that open-ended questions encouraged reflection on their leadership practices. Participants' responses support Zachary (2009) who contends that mentors who ask the right type of questions can support NAPs to reflect on leadership practices that improve student outcomes. For example, Thomas notes that his mentor always began their mentoring work with the question, 'What does good education look like in our schools?'. Similarly, Luke contends that the most constructive conversations he had with his mentor came from well-placed open-ended questions, 'A good question focuses the mind and allows you to reflect on the challenges and opportunities in front of you'.

Consistent with the literature (Hayes, 2019), a recurring narrative from the interviews is that the opportunities for mentoring conversations supporting LfL practices grew significantly when participants perceived a trusting mentoring relationship. From this perspective, I invited the focus group members to discuss what they consider were crucial elements that support successful mentoring relationships. A common sentiment expressed by the focus group participants is a desire to acknowledge the importance of trust, particularly the importance of benevolence within the relationship. However, while focus group participants did not describe specific mentor behaviours

that led to this sense of trust, several express the view that having a 'positive perception' of mentoring conversations led to developing trust and investment in the mentoring relationship. For example, Anne defined trust as a perception where 'it is safe to express oneself with honesty and discuss things of importance to you'. Conor defined trust as the ability to share beliefs and disappointments, knowing that you are in a safe and confidential environment.

Within the focus group, there was a consensus that trust was an awareness that the mentoring relationship was safe and non-judgemental. Ciara put it succinctly, 'trust means you have the confidence to open up and discuss your leadership style and express opinions and ideas openly and honestly'. All focus group participants agree with Conor's assertion that, 'trust allows for engaging discussions and feedback from your mentor to explore your leadership style'. These reflections align closely with the individual interview data in that trust can be especially beneficial for mentoring interactions where mentees feel safe to share their judgements and feelings with their mentor (Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004; Kram, 1985).

Overall, the data reveal that earlier mentoring conversations responded to the administrative and technical needs of NAPs. However, when interviewees felt confidence had been established, mentoring conversations aligned with issues that focused on leadership practices that sought to improve student learning. As Annette states, 'Trust was key to our relationship, giving me the confidence to discuss my school context, curriculum challenges, and my school leadership – without trust, I would not have gone there'. The findings indicate that supportive mentoring relationships based on trust are key to fostering the development of NAPs' LfL practices. Closely associated with trust and confidence is the mentee-mentor compatibility. This key issue and its corresponding influence on supportive mentoring relationships will now be explored.

5.2.2   Matching the mentor with the mentee

One of the significant findings of the study is the critical role of mentee-mentor compatibility. Within mentoring literature, authors often comment on the importance of matching in a mentoring relationship (Oplatka and Lapidot, 2017; Clayton et al., 2013). Furthermore, many suggest that a 'good fit' between a mentor and mentee is a key determinant of successful mentoring (Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004). However, Richardson (2015), striking a note of caution, suggests that being too alike can also restrict development opportunities.

The data indicate that when participants identify similar personal and professional traits with their mentor, they describe being motivated in areas of curricular management, shared leadership, and

innovation. This section considers the matching of mentor and mentee exploring two related issues, the influence of a good match on mentoring relationships followed by the challenges that a mismatch may pose.

Before commencing the mentoring programme, all participants completed a CSL questionnaire outlining their unique school context, experience, goals, and aspirations. When discussing if they were happy with their mentor, most interviewees express a high level of satisfaction with the matching process. For example, Jillian reveals her delight with her mentor, noting that he was, 'authentic, open and showed a real awareness of my concerns…we connected from the get-go'. Similarly, Annette considers that her mentor, 'proved to be a great match' who 'grasped my context and needs from our first meeting'. The data suggest that participants who intuitively perceived a **good match** reference a high level of approval with their mentor and satisfaction with the matching process. Thomas, affirming the positive influence on his mentoring relationship, notes how his mentor was, 'the perfect fit, as he was from the same sector (ETB), and a comparable school setting'. He also comments that, 'a good mentor can open up your eyes to the different possibilities and opportunities that promote quality teaching and learning in your school'.

Participants who spoke about valuable mentoring experiences often comment on the good match with their mentor. The elements of successful mentoring relations found in research, such as open dialogues and non-threatening relationships (Daresh, 2007; Young et al., 2005), echo the observations of John, who notes, 'My mentor created a professional atmosphere that stimulated conversation between us and stirred my established beliefs. We explored assessment strategies, sharing leadership roles and curricular development in imaginative and creative ways'. Talking about this issue, another participant said, 'My mentor and I agreed on the goal of education, that of supporting student learning, and we had engaging chats about feedback to staff, effective staff meetings and curriculum planning'. In this sense, when participants felt there was favourable matching with their mentor they reported being influenced by their mentor in areas of shared leadership, change, and innovation that improve teaching and learning.

Supporting Oplatka and Lapidot (2017), the data suggest that effective mentoring is fostered when the mentee and mentor share a similar educational philosophy. When participants identify a similar educational philosophy or outlook with their mentor, the relationship was spoken about in terms of 'openness' (Jillian) and 'honesty' (Annette), as reflected by the following comment:

I wanted to explore assessment strategies…my mentor was very supportive, providing examples of shared success criteria and guiding me in different approaches. It was clear from the beginning that our educational perspectives were very similar. We had many conversations about what student experiences should look like (Mathew).

When the mentor and mentee share similar educational views, they did not spend significant time on administrative or procedural issues. A key point emanating from the above data is that, in a mentoring relationship where the participants perceive a good match, mentoring conversations focused on the most effective ways to improve student learning through instructional practices such as classroom visits, providing feedback to teachers, curriculum and assessment knowledge and staff meetings.

Conversely, the data also uncover challenges that result from a **mismatch** within the mentoring dyad. Some participants felt the selection of mentors was 'somewhat random' (Tim) and 'arbitrary' (Niall) with little attempt to select mentors according to the new principals' needs or context. When participants note a lack or absence of an educational or professional connection with their mentor, they intentionally limited the range of topics discussed during the mentoring process. One participant from a small rural school was matched with a mentor from an urban school with more students. While acknowledging his mentor's experience, Mark felt that their contexts were too far apart to have any meaningful influence over his leadership practices, commenting that his mentor was from a very different school and did not fully appreciate the 'different demands of a school of our size'. Similarly, Tim laments the lack of connection with his mentor, who was, 'approachable and accommodating' but, 'he did not appreciate the contextual nuances of his school, which was within a different post-primary sector than his mentor.

These sentiments support Clayton et al. (2013), who found that careful consideration given to the matching process has a significant impact on the mentoring relationship. For example, Luke notes that while his mentor was, 'highly experienced and knowledgeable he was not the right fit. In hindsight, I perhaps would have achieved more if I had a different mentor'. Further, when participants held opposing views to their mentor, mentoring conversations were often limited to administrative and managerial aspects. These findings concur with Oplatka and Lapodot (2017:3) who consider that a mentor whom the new principal subjectively perceives as in disagreement with his/her educational views and values is more likely to lead to 'a superficial mentoring process that focuses on technical issues and administrative problems'.

The importance of getting the 'right match' is also acknowledged by the focus group participants as a key determinant of positive mentoring relationships. Participants in the focus group identify a 'feeling of connection' and 'a good fit' with the mentor's personality as being important. Anne describes it as, 'a feeling of being connected, where both in the process, acknowledge the mutual benefits'. However, David, considering that his mentoring relationship lacked 'real purpose' reflects that he 'cannot pinpoint what went wrong but that not every mentoring relationship is a good fit'. Focus group participants who indicate their mentor was a 'good match' refer to the positive relationship that developed. However, opinions differ on whether the mentor and mentee should be from different sectors or regions. Ciara expresses the need to have a mentor from outside her area, 'Whenever I had a problem and needed a listening ear, I feel that he was very supportive, mainly because he was removed from my context and I view him as a neutral person'. Supporting Gettys et al. (2010), focus group participants consider that there were benefits from both situations and that the matching of mentor with mentee should, at the outset, consider the mentees' comfort levels.

Summary

This theme indicates that participants agree on the significance of supportive relationships during the mentoring process. This data suggests that support at the early stages of mentoring includes professional and practical advice, specifically with managerial and administrative issues. Reflecting the theoretical framework of this study, the leadership mentoring framework, the development of trust between the mentee and mentor steered these conversations towards instructional leadership practices that focused on improving student learning outcomes. 'Good' matching of the mentor and mentee seems to have increased reciprocal relations between both parties because, as Young et al. (2005) claim, these relationships require a degree of care and commitment rather than a casual or 'strictly business' approach. This is in contrast with 'poor' matching, where participants felt there were partial or no educational similarities and the type and scope of topics discussed were limited.

Acknowledging that mentees are following their mentors into school leadership positions, the mentoring process provides opportunities for sharing experiences, knowledge and a shared language. This sharing of experiences during mentoring conversations is the second theme and the focus of the next section.

5.3   Theme 2: Sharing learning experiences

In conversations with participants, there is a general consensus that sharing learning experiences with the mentor constitute a crucial mentoring practice. Previous research suggests that

experienced principals who model suitable leadership activities and have a firm grasp of instructional practices tend to be influential mentors in supporting NAPs' LfL practices (Hayes, 2019; Scott, 2010). Acknowledging the diversity of some mentoring conversations, participants view the sharing of learning experiences with their mentor as opportunities to discuss and reflect on leadership practices that improve student learning and support the professional development of teachers. The data suggest that sharing learning experiences within mentoring dyads helps mentees to develop their leadership practices that support student learning. The following section explores this theme under two subthemes, namely focusing on teaching and learning and supporting the professional development of staff.

5.3.1   Focusing on teaching and learning

Mentoring conversations that focused on sharing learning experiences can be considered referencing the following issues: school vision, classroom practice, and a distributed approach to leadership. The following paragraphs explore each issue.

Several participants note that one of the first conversations with their mentor was around the creation of the **school vision**. Numerous studies support the idea that the principal's role in establishing a clear vision, framing school goals, and gaining staff consensus are strong predictors of school improvement (Boyce and Bowers, 2018; MacBeath et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2007). John recalls an early conversation with his mentor around the creation of a 'visible vision' for his school, recalling:

> …my mentor encouraged me to place emphasis on one or two ideas that were workable and not have a vision that was too ambiguous and possibly open to different interpretations. The goals must be accessible and inspire staff, so their 'buy-in' is necessary…my mentor gave me great insight into his own experiences and guided me to fine-tune my vision and goals, so they were loyal to my core values as an educator.

Likewise, Thomas refers to similar discussions with his mentor, identifying students' needs as central to the formation of his school vision. He recalls the first question posed by his mentor, 'What are the needs of your students? That was the question that my mentor hit me with when we first met, and I spent the next few months trying to answer…he encouraged me to keep my students' needs at the forefront of my thoughts, no matter the problems and difficulties that present themselves'.

These discussions align with MacBeath et al. (2018) and Robinson (2011) who contend that building a vision requires gaining commitment from all those involved by linking goals and values which people hold dearly. Supporting this view, Jillian notes that her mentor encouraged open conversations with her staff, focusing on 'driving things forward' whilst implementing recommendations from a recent Whole School Evaluation (WSE) report. She recalls:

> My mentor was very supportive, detailing his own experiences and valuable guidance. He encouraged me to press pause now and again and connect my vision to the day-to-day work of the teachers within the context of WSE recommendations.

The data support Seashore (2015) who suggests that LfL involves linking with teachers and others within the teaching and learning process where these links act as supports for school leaders in the formation of the school vision.

Focus group participants also refer to sharing learning experiences during mentoring conversations that focused on establishing a vision and forming clear goals. One pertinent example is provided by Ciara, who recalls how her mentor created a shared vision in his school, framed around a fundamental value of his, which was having a school where people were happy. Ciara explains:

> We explored some activities and discussed what an effective school could look like and what we both valued as school leaders. From our conversations, I grasped the value of having people who are happy. Get that right, and so much more can happen. My mentor shared his experiences and we still, to this day, have exploratory conversations about what the composition of the 'perfect school' is.

School leaders need to be visionaries to guide others in the acceptance and promotion of the school's vision and goals (Hallinger, 2011). Getting the school community to embrace and live out the school vision requires school leaders to share ownership and responsibility, using evidence about current levels of student attainment to set out important and attainable targets (Robinson, 2011). Conor captures the focus group's sentiments, noting how the creation of the vision can support school improvement, 'It is energising to see how another principal creates and nurtures their vision…exploring these activities helps me frame what is happening in my school'. Similarly, several participants from both the individual interviews and focus group note that their mentor willingly

shared learning experiences encouraging strategic planning and utilising established frameworks such as the SSE process and sub-committees to ensure discussion and reflection in creating the school vision. The findings support previous research (Hallinger, 2011) emphasising the importance of setting and communicating clear goals.

Several participants identify the importance of receiving feedback from the mentor, in particular providing insights into timetabled subjects but not a requirement for a deep understanding of all timetabled subjects. Mary notes a conversation with her mentor about effective feedback to teachers and how to better prepare for 'those difficult conversations'. Agreeing with her mentor, she recalls, 'It was reaffirming to talk to my mentor about the need to equip myself with a synopsis of subjects including assessment and reporting', noting that this knowledge 'would be invaluable in future conversations with teachers'.

In conversations with participants, there is a consensus that **classroom practice** is a key determinant of school effectiveness. Furthermore, several participants perceive endeavours that enhance classroom practice as effective ways to legitimise their leadership. The data show that mentoring conversations tapped into several topics that focus on instructional activities, including classroom visits, assessment strategies and feedback to teachers. Thomas recalls working with his mentor on aspects of instructional leadership that he considers crucial to effective leadership, particularly the effectiveness of classroom visits, recalling how his mentor would 'find reasons to visit a classroom and keep a watchful eye on the learning'. Another participant spoke of the importance of open conversations that sought ways 'to keep a finger on the pulse of classroom learning by walking the corridors, soaking up classroom activity and selectively visiting classrooms' (Luke). These conversations with mentors encourage the quick and short 'classroom walkthrough' (Southworth, 2009) and represent an important tool used by school leaders to form an impression as to what is taking place in the classroom. Similarly, while emphasising the importance of classroom visits, another participant recalls authentic conversations with his mentor, clarifying their purpose, commenting, 'If principals are not well equipped with a clear understanding of classroom visits, their observations and feedback could be unproductive' (Thomas).

Referencing Junior Cycle reform (section 2.4), several participants recall mentoring conversations that encouraged participation in pedagogical discussions with subject teachers. These mentoring conversations allude to Student Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings associated with Junior Cycle assessment. For example, Luke recalls that his mentor encouraged attendance at some

SLAR meetings to get 'a feel for curricular reform but also to get insight into teachers' collaborative practices and how best to support them with assessment strategies'.

Likewise, Thomas refers to discussions with his mentor around the opportunities that SLAR meetings present for teachers 'to discuss methodologies and assessment practices and the importance for school leaders to be attuned to important issues that may arise at these meetings'.

A key issue emanating from the data is that several participants reference mentoring conversations that deliberated on the ultimate goal of education. During these conversations, participants' reflections mirror much of the current debate about the growth of neoliberal agendas in educational reform. Implicit in the data is an overarching presence of the terminal exam for the Junior Cycle, particularly the Leaving Certificate. As noted by one participant, 'the terminal exam greatly influences teaching and learning because access to third-level is largely based on the terminal exam' (John). This reflects the performability and accountability culture where learning can become narrowly defined and focused on results and standards (Sugrue, 2015; Symthe and Wrigley, 2013; Lynch, 2012; Dimmock, 2012; Gleeson and O'Donnabháin, 2009). John elaborating further notes that the current design of the exam system and because of the 'relentless pressure to secure points at the Leaving Certificate', teaching practices can be 'overly influenced by prescriptive, traditional methods that focus on the end product rather than students' learning'.

Reflecting on and acknowledging the pressures of the performability and accountability culture, several participants note conversations with their mentor that placed the overall goal of education beyond the test results. Annette recalls 'inspirational' conversations with her mentor where 'exam results were viewed as essential but only part of what a well-rounded education should be about'. Similarly, Mathew felt that his mentor reaffirmed his beliefs that school leaders need to ensure a holistic approach to educational experiences noting that, 'education is too important to be left at the mercy of crude testing instruments that fail to capture the richness and value of students' learning'. Moreover, Luke captures the sentiments of many participants reflecting on the learning needs of the school community, noting, 'we cannot make the mistake that learning is for students alone, we need to ensure students, teachers and school leaders constantly focus on ways to improve learning experiences for all'. The findings reveal that the role of values was evident in conversations with participants. Reflecting many participants' perceptions, John recalls:

> My mentor encouraged me to think about the bigger picture constantly. Students'
> competitiveness depends on the capacity of active learning and not just what is learnt

from a textbook. Knowledge will be outdated someday, but competence will stand the test of time.

Also worthy of note is an acknowledgement by participants of the opportunities and challenges that are presented through current educational policies that enhance school autonomy. For example, Luke recalls mentoring conversations exploring various approaches to planning his school's Junior Cycle programme, such as option choice and time allocation to each subject. Likewise, Thomas identifies 'the numerous possibilities that schools can take to create a curriculum that responds to the needs of students'. Equally, several participants reference what they perceive as the challenges of school autonomy. Annette notes the constant pressure to be ready for the 'inevitable school inspection' while Thomas and Jillian equate school autonomy with the responsibility to be accountable for all school decisions and the quality of education in their schools

Another recurring narrative in the interviews was a sense among participants that mentoring conversations support a **distributed approach to leadership**. Over two decades ago, Elmore (2000) argued that leadership of schools is beyond the capacity of any one person and that a principal alone can no longer be wholly responsible for leadership and all outcomes of the school. The changing context of Irish post-primary schools with a growing student population increased diversity and complexity, and societal changes have necessitated a leadership paradigm where 'all teachers play a leadership role in the school' (DES, 2016c:7), see section 2.4. Reflecting on mentoring conversations, John suggests that new principals need to seek colleagues' support and guidance, which he considers a 'cornerstone of good leadership practice'. Acknowledging his mentor's help, he recalls how 'reflective mentoring discussions' and feedback from his mentor reinforced his ideas. Removing some of the burdens from the shoulders of principals resonates strongly with Annette, who notes that her 'mentor was explicit with his past experiences and provided some relevant examples about looking after yourself as a new principal'. She also recalls his advice not to take on too much and ensure that others' 'leadership roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined'.

According to MacBeath (2000), leadership distribution is both opportunistically and strategically managed by principals as they focus on school improvement. Implicitly what emerges from the data is that mentors place significant emphasis on the importance of shared leadership. Annette recalls that her mentor continually nudged mentoring conversations to listen to teachers and value their suggestions and opinions. Likewise, Luke refers to work with his mentor that explored some practical

examples where teachers could collectively work together to improve teaching and learning practices. Niall candidly discloses that he needed to slow down during his first year as principal and 'listen more attentively to staff'. He notes that his mentor's feedback to intensify the sharing of responsibilities to ensure 'innovations and improvements became the responsibility of all and not the one'. These findings provide useful insights into mentoring conversations where school communities are viewed as one of shared practice where relationships are vibrant and where power and influence are shared with teachers who are directly engaged with teaching and learning.

However, several participants articulate the challenge of influencing classroom practice on the one hand and enacting shared leadership responsibilities on the other. These observations reflect similar observations critics of DL have raised (Lumby, 2019; Timperley, 2005). For example, Annette notes mentoring conversations that placed shared leadership as a key leadership practice but notes that shared leadership is a limited concept because 'the buck stops at the top and no matter how much you do to change structures and mindsets, the principal is ultimately in charge'. Similarly, Luke acknowledges the importance of shared leadership; however, he agrees with his mentor that the concept can become a top-down approach where delegation rather than sharing is the method of enactment.

There is broad recognition by participants that shared leadership is a 'work in progress' (Anne) and is 'not a quick fix but is complicated and messy' (Thomas). This view of leadership aligns with previous research (Gurr, 2019; Boyce and Bowers, 2018; MacBeath et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2007) that LfL is team-orientated and collaborative, engaging those in formal management roles and those in less formal management roles. Overall, the data suggest that mentoring conversations support leadership practices that promote teacher participation in educational improvement endeavours.

Focus group participants recall similar mentoring conversations that support shared leadership. However, while individual interview participants discussed shared leadership with teachers, focus group participants view shared leadership as encompassing teachers, parents and students. For example, Anne and Ciara note mentoring discussions that highlight the importance of parents and students in school decision making.

> My mentor was very open about his own experiences and fostering good relations with
> the parent body, especially the parents' council. Parents can provide different
> perspectives, and you can tap into other supports that may be otherwise hidden. My

mentor offered many examples of how the parent body supported school endeavours (Anne).

During our early conversations, my mentor ensured that I did not lose sight of the critical influence of all key stakeholders, not just teachers, but student and parents (Ciara).

There was general agreement with focus group participants that engaging all stakeholders in the process of sharing leadership can open up new perspectives and generate new thinking. As Conor notes, 'school leaders need to create an effective communication system with parents and the community to foster a spirit of co-operation and support'. However, as MacBeath et al. (2018) point out, this activity requires school leaders to be active listeners and be open to challenge existing ways of thinking.

A consequence of enacting leadership practices that support collaborative approaches to leadership brings into focus the next sub-theme, fostering a culture of ongoing professional support for teachers.

5.3.2   Supporting the professional development of teachers

The importance of building teacher capacity to support teaching and learning is highlighted as a criterion for improved learning outcomes (Timperley, 2011). However, despite its social nature, teaching is a practice in Ireland has long been marked by professional isolation and insulation of teachers from each other, school leadership and parents (Hogan et al., 2007). Reflecting the challenge of professional isolation that prevails in many school settings, a common sentiment expressed by participants is a desire to acquire the skills to work with teachers to promote their continuing professional development and collaborative practice.

The data reveal that many mentees rely on their mentor's shared experience to help them develop and support teachers, many regarding their mentor as an expert in practices that support professional development. In this respect, mentors provide support that can be related to four main issues: creating a growth mindset, collaboration, professional learning communities (PLC), and creating a positive school environment.

Supporting teachers' professional development, some participants report that mentors help them instil a **growth mindset**. A growth mindset is an idea that your intelligence is not fixed and sees challenge or difficulty as an opportunity to improve and learn (Dweck, 2008). Several participants recall mentoring conversations that focus on releasing that potential capacity and in so doing, instilling a growth mindset (Searby, 2014).

John recalls that he had spent many years upskilling himself as an educator and had developed a 'true love of learning'. However, he found it increasingly difficult to translate his love of learning into an agreed understanding with his staff, as he stated:

> I always sought solutions and innovative ways of improving the learning in my classroom…I found it challenging to push my suggestions and ideas with staff. Rather than telling me what to do, my mentor supported me in framing discussions with staff that open different ways of responding to challenges and opportunities.

Like John, Luke encountered a challenging situation in his school, where he wanted to introduce the Transition Year (TY) programme to enhance students' learning experience. Concerns were expressed by staff about staffing, curriculum planning and lack of school resources. He wanted his staff to 'see the bigger picture' and the opportunities that TY would bring for student learning and the professional development of staff. Luke recalls that his mentor provided supportive feedback in sharing learning experiences that proved very helpful 'in asking the right type of questions and provoking responses from teachers that moved the conversation on from possible difficulties to probable solutions and ways forward'. Many participants echo Luke's observations, particularly how mentors model and encourage participants to motivate teachers in seeking professional development opportunities.

In this regard, Tim describes his mentor as 'caring and insightful' when it came to **collaborating** with teachers in relation to their professional needs. At the same time, Jillian considers her mentor as 'an empathic leader who regularly engages with teachers to ensure agreed expectations are meet'. Other participant's comment on how mentoring conversations encourage reflection on leadership activities that promote collaborative practices amongst teachers. John elaborates that his mentor has reinforced his view that a central tenet of school leadership is to 'empower teachers to take the lead in their own professional development'. Likewise, Mary recalls that her mentor had yearly 'development meetings' with staff to identify teachers' evolving needs that focus on teaching and

learning. The findings support O'Donovan (2015:261), who suggests that collaboration and engagement with teachers can reduce the sense of isolation and open 'the impenetrable classroom door that traditionally secured the classroom's virtual autonomy teacher'.

Focus group participants deliberated on the importance of building collaborative learning communities in their schools. Ciara shared that she worked with her mentor at developing more effective **PLCs** to support teacher development and growth. Ciara explains that she travelled to her mentor's school to 'get a better understanding of how a school's context can support the establishment and development of PLCs'. She notes that her mentor continually emphasised the need for teacher dialogue using PLCs that support a reflective model of professional practice. Ciara liked the process and implemented a similar model in her school using the *Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2016c) (section 2.4) to plan for teachers' next stage in their professional development.

Focus group participants express a keen awareness of the *Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2016c) and how it was referenced during mentoring conversations identifying the professional development needs of teachers. For example, Anne describes how her mentor framed conversations around the statements of effective practice, 'I recall how my mentor used the Quality Framework to focus our discussions…it was used as a supporting document to confirm my thinking about building stronger teams of teachers who take the lead in improving teaching and learning'. Likewise, Conor recalls conversations with his mentor that utilise the SSE process as the scaffold to develop PLCs that support staff collaboration and professional growth. These reflections support Robinson (2011) and Blasé and Blasé (2000), who contend that principals influence teaching and learning when they support teachers by talking with them to promote reflection and professional development.

Several participants spoke of sharing learning experiences in their mentoring sessions that promote **positive learning environments** in their schools. According to Murphy et al. (2007), promoting a positive school environment provides a safe learning environment, creates high student performance, promotes continuous improvement, and ensures personalised learning environments that create multiple options for meaningful student engagement. The findings reveal that participants value the shared experiences of their mentors in creating positive learning environments. John, reflecting on his mentoring experience, comments, 'I can say that my mentor, for the first time in my career, made me aware of the crucial importance of a positive school

environment'. Consistent with the literature (Osborne-Lampkin, 2015:2), several mentoring conversations emphasise the requirement for 'a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for students'. Mark, reflecting on his own leadership practice, notes, 'it can be empowering to listen and learn from a colleague who has considerable experience in creating and nurturing a successful and progressive school environment with quality teaching and learning at its core'.

The data show that several mentors had modelled how to create and maintain a positive school environment. Moreover, some participants note that mentoring meetings took place in their mentor's school. Luke offers this descriptive account of visiting his mentor's school, noting:

> I watched him as he engaged and spoke to his staff, noticing how he empowered people
> to let them know how important they were…by just watching and listening to my
> mentor, I learnt a lot about relationships and how to nurture a positive school
> environment.

The data echo the findings of Daresh (2004) who suggests that mentoring can support mentees in building a positive school environment that leads to improved school outcomes. Drawing on SCLT, sharing learning experiences is essential because these experiences mirror one another from the mentor's school to the mentee's school. Several participants disclose that it is helpful to see how their mentor operates as a leader in his/her school and then replicate the same experience within their own school (Bandura, 1986).

In the following vignettes, participants observe and reflect upon the activities of their mentors. Mathew provides a concise example of this type of activity where he views his mentor as a leader who always led by example, noting:

> ...he acknowledges the work of teachers whenever he could. He regularly wrote thank
> you notes, giving small tokens of appreciation and ultimately thinking of ways to keep
> his staff focused and inspired. He modelled this type of leadership for me, and I now do
> similar things with all my staff.

Likewise, Mary recalls visiting her mentor's school campus, noting:

My mentor greeted everyone by their first name and with a smile…this was a crucial

learning moment for me and one that I adhere to today. This was creating and

nurturing a school environment that cared about people. It is leading by example.

Such experiences align with Hallinger and Heck (2011) and Robinson et al. (2009) who contend that influential school leaders work directly in their indirect influence giving frequent feedback, recognising and awarding accomplishment.

Building a positive school environment where teachers' professional needs are identified and responded to can be considered one of the underlying reasons schools can flourish (Townsend et al., 2013; Marsh, 2012; Hallinger and Heck, 2010). LfL emphasises the centrality of teaching and learning and suggests that leaders' influence on student outcomes is via staff, especially teachers (Earley, 2017). Emphasising this point, one participant recalls mentoring conversations reflecting on initiatives aimed at improving numeracy and literacy standards. Annette notes that her mentor sought and valued teachers' opinions where suggestions were developed into action plans that were then implemented. She notes this practice as, 'an excellent example of promoting a healthy learning environment where opinions of others are sought and valued that allow for latitude to try new approaches without fear of failure'. The findings support numerous writers identifying the principal as a central shaper of a positive school environment (Daniëls et al., 2019; Leithwood et al., 2019; Boyce and Bower, 2018).

Summary

This theme shows that participants acknowledge the importance of mentoring conversations that provide for shared learning experiences and opportunities to observe and reflect on shared practice and determine what actions are most beneficial to creating an environment that supports quality teaching and learning. In line with the leadership mentoring framework and consistent with the literature (Augustine-Shaw and Liang, 2016; Seashore 2015; Searby, 2014), this theme suggests that mentoring supports NAPs' engagement, enthusiasm and recognition of the importance of shared leadership in schools. However, the findings also reveal the challenge for NAPs to reconcile their desire to influence classroom practice on the one hand and enact shared leadership responsibilities on the other.

Evident in all conversations with participants is the importance of acknowledging emotions. Emotions are a significant aspect of work-life, and as such, the ability to manage them and

understand and perceive the feelings of others is critical to the work of principals. This issue is the focus of the next section.

5.4   Theme 3: Emotional awareness

Emotions influence how we perceive and react to life, as well as how we are perceived. Supporting Goleman and Boyatzis (2008), participants note mentoring conversations that recognise emotional awareness as crucial to their leadership practice. While the previous two themes focus on mentoring conversations that support leadership practices that focus on improving teaching and learning, this theme suggests that school leaders' emotions underpin all leadership decisions. The data reveals that emotional intelligence and mentoring seem to be related in two basic ways. First, the emotional intelligence of both the mentor and mentee appears to influence the quality of mentoring. Second, the best mentoring relationships often help participants become more socially and emotionally competent (Cherniss, 2007). These abilities relate to principalship in that managing emotions is fundamental to developing an effective way of being a leader and for making sense of the interlinked network of activity that makes the politics, procedures and tasks of school life run smoothly (Harris, 2013).

This theme suggests that school leaders seek empowerment with knowledge beyond that of management and leadership. This knowledge relates to the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions. The most complex of these skills is that of managing emotion, not only for one's self but also of others, as a principal's main goal is to influence others towards the direction of his/her school vision (Leithwood et al., 2019:5). Several key issues are identified from the data encompassing three broad subthemes that capture participants' actual experiences and the perceived impact of mentoring conversations on their emotional awareness. The following section explores each subtheme in turn: being open, communicating effectively, and being situationally aware.

5.4.1   Being open

One meaning assigned by participants to emotional awareness is that it is important to be open to the ideas and suggestions of all stakeholders and to encourage and engage in dialogue about ideas that improve teaching and learning (Seashore, 2015). Dialogue, especially among people from different contexts, can open up new perspectives and establish new patterns of thought (MacBeath et al., 2018). Quality relationships with staff, based on being open to other viewpoints, were viewed by participants as one the most important aspect of their leadership practice. Commenting on the

importance of being open, John spoke about mentoring conversations that demonstrate a desire to engage in dialogue to effect positive change. Reflecting on initial mentoring conversations recalls:

> My mentor encouraged me to be aware and receptive to ideas from anyone if they
> were genuine. This was shrewd advice because now I guarantee to my staff that
> any suggestion that they have that makes sense to them and their colleagues, we
> will try to implement. It is important to show people that if they have invested time
> and energy in an idea focused on improving things, then we will try and do it.

Whatever their perspectives or style, a key focus of building an open dialogue for principals is the requirement to keep the focus on quality teaching and learning, which Townsend et al. (2013:83) define as the ability to 'interact comprehensively with one's environment'. One participant both broadened and expanded this perspective, recalling mentoring conversations that stressed the value of making yourself aware and of being open to the ideas of others and a willingness to engage in dialogue, ensuring the best course of action was taken. As Tim notes:

> I wanted to implement some significant curricular changes during my first term
> as principal. However, my mentor suggested that I step back and take a more
> global approach, acknowledging all opinions, the good, bad and the ugly of
> others, including teachers, parents and students. Up to that point, my radar was
> mainly focused on what I thought had to be done. I now spend more time
> reflecting on the school's needs and to do this I continuously seek various inputs
> through focused dialogue.

Members of the focus group also reveal how mentoring conversations support numerous ways to be open to others. Anne recalls working with her mentor on an action plan to implement her goals. She recalls receiving feedback from her mentor on crafting an entry plan designed to capture all stakeholders' views and concerns in the hope of building 'a strategic plan that incorporates the collective voice of all concerned'. A common view from focus group participants was that mentors encourage self-reflection and the need to step back from taking quick decisions that impact the work of teachers. For example, focus group participants agree with Ciara that mentoring provides 'numerous opportunities to discuss types of open dialogue that encourage feedback from stakeholders'.

Supporting Zachary (2000), the findings reveal a sense amongst participants that mentoring conversations promote the quality of the relationship by fostering dialogue through collegial inquiry, sharing values, and generating challenges to established patterns of thought. Several participants refer to valuing teacher judgements, especially when reasons are sought for what has been occurring locally and determining what should happen in the future. In general, there is a recognition that mentoring can encourage a willingness to listen to the other view, and this can be particularly productive when different points of view sow the seeds for new ways of thinking (Daresh, 2004).

5.4.2   Communicating effectively

Another common issue expressed by participants, related to emotional awareness, is the need to communicate effectively with teachers and the wider school community (Goleman 1998). The literature indicates that communication plays an essential role in the development of trust within an organisation (Tschannem-Moran, 2014; Blasé and Blasé, 2000). Several participants spoke about mentoring conversations that view communicating effectively as a prerequisite for effective leadership. For example, Luke recalls how his mentor encouraged him to use straightforward language to 'paint a clear and coherent story' when seeking innovation and change from staff. He spoke about a situation where he had to focus colleagues' attention on engaging with different teaching strategies that support formative assessment, noting:

> My line with the staff was that we needed to look at our own professional experience and creativity; we have the ingenuity and skillset to implement assessment strategies that can improve learning outcomes.

What makes this quote notable are the aspects of storytelling implicit in the commentary in that teachers are encouraged to take on the responsibility to explore teaching methodologies themselves. Likewise, Thomas comments how his mentor used storytelling to get the message across to others, noting that, 'the power of an authentic story can open up possibilities and new avenues where the impossible can be achieved'. Supporting Salovey et al. (2004:210) the findings suggest that individuals with a high level of emotional awareness can connect through storytelling and clear, meaningful prose. In this context, participants identify mentoring conversations that support a direct, candid approach to empowering others to find solutions. Thomas puts it succinctly, 'it's about using plain English where your audience should get it at the first hearing'.

This subtheme shows that mentoring conversations alluded to effective communication as a purposeful way to convey meaning; however, participants offer a nuanced perspective, as expressed in the following comments:

> Most communication can be considered subjective, so it is about the how, rather than the what (Conor).

> The most important word to use when talking to someone is their name (Mathew).

Also, the role of listening is acknowledged by participants as sharing information with others can benefit the entire school community and can be crucial to peoples' understanding of what the decisions were and why decisions were made. The data indicate that mentoring conversations support participants to be socially and emotionally competent while acknowledging the importance of reflection, transparency and communicating effectively, as noted by the following comments:

> When you constantly reflect on previous experiences, you can better comprehend things from different perspectives. My mentor encouraged reflection and active listening skills to provide for the sharing of ideas required if we are to improve student learning (Mary).

> Barriers to school improvement can be removed if you just listen to teachers, it is not that they might be right, or you might be wrong, it is about moving slowly and thereby allowing movement where all have a stake in the outcome (Niall).

This need for authentic collaboration with staff is, according to several participants, at the core of mentoring conversations that focus on communication. Jillian puts it candidly, '...if you fail to listen honestly and fail to seek out those difficult conversations, you will get burnt and find your vision stalling rather quickly'. While many participants saw communication as a competency that was necessary, some participants found it more challenging to acquire than others. For example, Thomas recalls his mentor emphasising the importance of effective communication but also acknowledges the difficulty in doing so, 'I work hard to be a good communicator, and on my mentor's advice I have read widely in this area, however, if I am honest, I have a lot to learn as each day presents new challenges'. Like interview participants, focus group participants saw effective communication as an essential leadership skill (Searby, 2014); however, few indicate that mentoring conversations focused on this capability to any degree. Rather, focus group participants felt mentoring

conversations focused on knowing the school context and understanding local issues as key determinants that support effective communication.

Overall, this subtheme suggests that it was common practice for mentoring conversations to strive for a frank and straightforward manner of communication with stakeholders that had as its purpose improved student learning. To communicate effectively, all participants recognise the importance of the school context and to being aware of their surroundings. This recurrent narrative will now be explored.

5.4.3   Being situationally aware

School principals deal with day-to-day emotionality that often requires their emotions to be hidden (Maxwell and Riley, 2016). Participants readily acknowledge the importance of understanding one's own contextualised environment as crucial because every school context has its own culture and values (Hallinger, 2011). Salovey et al. (2004) refer to this situational awareness as the ability to be hyper-vigilant or micropolitically literate. This subtheme reveals that mentoring conversations associate the ability to be situationally aware and appreciate one's emotions (Cross and Parker, 2004).

Expanding on the relationship between situational awareness and one's emotions, many participants gave examples of mentoring conversations that allude to both a 'micro' and 'macro' awareness, revealing their understanding of how people might perceive or react to a school activity or situation. Some examples refer to relatively minor engagements, such as addressing a parent or student anxiety. However, one revealing example describes how a participant had to react to some teachers refusing to engage in subject department meetings. In this example, Tim recalls speaking to his mentor about unresolved legacy issues within the department and the ongoing impact on the teaching staff. On his mentor's advice, he sought solutions ensuring that the self-respect of all involved was maintained. In this respect, several participants acknowledge work with their mentor, emphasising the need to be situationally aware and the importance of 'keeping a finger on the pulse of the ongoing drama that influences all school settings' (John).

Many participants were open and willing to discuss difficult emotional situations and receive feedback from their mentor (Maxwell and Riley, 2016). Referring to such an example, one participant considers that the concealing and forging of emotions can be, 'emotionally draining and even create barriers to personal development' (David). However, a prevailing view from the

individual interviews reveals that mentors encouraged NAPs to appreciate the emotionality of work colleagues and at the same time find a healthy balance with their personal lives.

Summary

This theme suggests that mentoring conversations reflected on the ability to be emotionally aware as essential to self and others, and a necessary skill for school leaders to possess (Harris, 2013). Also, there is an implication in several narratives that understanding emotions encompasses the ability to be socially and emotionally competent, including the ability to engage with others in an emotionally regulated and kind way. Mentoring conversations seem to underscore the importance of emotionally mature leadership (Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008). Specifically, the data indicate that mentoring conversations that support various interpersonal exchanges can enhance the teaching and learning experience. These findings align with Maxwell and Riley (2016) who contend that school leaders must possess increasingly complex emotional intelligence skills to become successful leaders. Overall, this exploration of emotional awareness, as part of the mentoring process, indicates that participants view emotions as facilitating others' thoughts and concepts regarding proposed initiatives that improve teaching and learning.

The final theme focuses on participants actual and perceived motivation and commitment to the mentoring process.

5.5   Theme 4: Mentee motivation

From the literature review, one can gather that adults learn best when they are goal orientated and self-directed (Dominguez and Hager, 2013; Zachary, 2009; Young et al., 2005; Bandura, 1977b, 1986). This theme indicates that participants wish to seek out learning experiences and new knowledge that explore leadership practices that lead to improved student outcomes. Particularly revealing is how participants describe their understandings and expectations of the mentoring programme. The data suggest that participants can hold a variety of expectations and perceptions relating to mentoring, leading, at times to a lack of commitment for some participants. While the sentiments expressed are not mutually exclusive, these constructs seem to influence interviewees' motivation and commitment to the mentoring process. From the data, three subthemes developed that capture participants' motivation, namely, mentee expectations, perceived motivation of mentors and protecting mentoring time. Each of these subthemes will now be explored.

5.5.1 Mentee expectations

This subtheme explores participants' expectations of the mentoring programme reflecting the numerous demands they face in school. As discussed in section 3.3.3, the core purpose of mentoring is to provide an experiential learning experience for mentees, support their professional growth and in the context of this study, their transition into the role as leaders of learning. Participants identify this learning during their first critical year as principal in a variety of ways including, 'the ability to meet external expectations' (Annette), 'developing interpersonal skills' (John), 'maintaining and growing self-esteem' (Luke), 'turning barriers into goals' (Niall), and 'maintaining a sense of pleasure in the role' (Mary). All participants spoke candidly about their motivation to learn and their anticipation of growing into their new role.

Most participants indicate that their mentor encouraged them to reflect on the relevance of mentoring opportunities. The following reflections mirror research (Searby, 2014), suggesting that openness and motivation to learning makes a difference in the outcomes. Luke believes that his mentor was a, 'considerable motivational influence', encouraging him to focus on 'the core purpose of school leadership and student learning'. While acknowledging pre-existing sources of supports in the form of local principals and online support, another participant views mentoring as the opportunity to reflect on his practice and as a 'springboard for an alternative way of initiating staff discussions that promote student learning' (Mathew).

Particularly revealing is how interviewees describe how their motivation to learn had a significant impact on mentoring conversations. Supporting the literature (Clayton et al., 2013), the findings reveal that participants had varied opinions about the opportunities and challenges posed by mentoring. For example, Luke felt that the mentoring process was challenging and pushed him to consider different leadership approaches. He recalls mentoring conversations and feedback from his mentor that pushed him to, 'examine his current understanding and implement new ways of encouraging teachers to adopt effective teaching methodologies'. Likewise, one participant recalls the 'motivational drive' he experienced when he identified specific issues and topics for discussion in advance of meeting with his mentor. Niall explains that he 'pinpointed' three areas that he wished to explore with his mentor, 'improving collaboration across subject departments, opportunities for shared leadership and effective assessment practices'. Similarly, when asked about his expectations of mentoring, Mathew comments that he had hoped to reaffirm his opinions and actions, but at the same time, 'was open to different approaches'. The findings suggest that participants were

motivated and eager to engage in the mentoring when they had framed learning expectations for themselves (Young et al., 2005; Daresh, 2004).

One concern expressed by a small number of participants was the belief that they were not fully committed to the mentoring process. Elaborating further, John comments that he did not give himself enough time to reflect on how mentoring could influence his professional goals. Similarly, Thomas acknowledges that he did not fully, 'appreciate the nature of mentoring conversations' or his role in shaping these discussions. These findings align with Ragins (2016) who suggests that mentees different expectations can significantly influence their motivation and subsequent engagement in the mentoring process.

Overall, the findings indicate that most participants have a desire to stay on top of the ever-increasing challenges of school leadership, which in turn motivates them to ask questions, reflect, and learn while seeking applications for their unique situations (Dweck, 2008). When reflecting on their mentoring expectations several participants identify the motivation of their mentor as a crucial element in successful mentoring.

5.5.2   Perceived motivation of mentors

The commitment of mentors was discussed by all participants, specifically whether some mentors had the time or motivation to engage in the mentoring programme. When there were less than favourable comments about a mentor's commitment, participants sometimes relate these to a lack of incentive on the part of their mentor. For example, Niall expresses the opinion that his mentor was not fully committed to the process because he was already involved 'in numerous educational enterprises and projects'. When asked about mentoring expectations, two participants in the focus group echo similar concerns that reference their mentor's dependability. One participant, Conor, recalls several occasions when his mentor was late for mentoring meetings and failed to show for a scheduled meeting. This experience gave him a sense of, 'inconsistency and a lack of attentiveness' on his mentor's part towards the programme. Furthermore, echoing the challenges of balancing the power differentials (Rippon and Martin, 2006) within mentoring, David relays a similar perception, noting that his mentor, 'was more focused on recalling his own experiences and not advancing my leadership style...he seemed to be superficially involved'.

However, for most participants, the data suggest that when mentors exhibit an authentic interest, provide feedback and a desire to help, then mentoring conversations are reflective, helpful and

supportive (Daresh, 2007). Many participants recall their mentor leading discussions that encourage self-reflection and inquiry that provide motivational support. As Mary recalls, praising her mentor's drive, 'the mentoring process it not about providing 'answers', it is about developing independent decision-making that provides a catalyst for change'. Similarly, focus group participants agree that mentoring must acknowledge the motivational goals of both the mentee and mentor at the start of the process. Ciara captures these sentiments with the following quote:

> My motivation to engage in the mentoring process was acknowledged and sustained by my mentor, who, like me, had an unwavering focus on putting learning first and acquiring the courage to keep the needs of students at the top of the agenda.

Closely aligned with mentees' expectations and perceived motivation of mentors is the mentee's commitment to creating space and time to engage effectively with the mentoring process.

5.5.3   Protecting mentoring time

A common view shared by all participants at the commencement of the mentoring process is the desire to commit their time and energy (Daresh, 2004). However, while each participant had face-to-face meetings with their mentor, the regularity of these meetings varied between mentoring dyads. One of the key challenges for participants is finding the opportunity to 'pull yourself away from the job' (Mark) and create time to engage effectively in mentoring. Reflecting the views of several participants, Annette comments that her mentor was very accessible 'despite the distance between them'. Participants reference many occasions when they could not meet their mentor regularly or in person; however, many mentoring dyads used email, phone, and social media to maintain contact.

Consistent with the literature, there was a sense of urgency amongst participants that they needed to make mentoring time a priority (Hayes, 2019; Daresh, 2004). One participant put it plainly, 'there just aren't enough hours in the day, and at times that is true, but there should always be enough hours in the day when something is important to you' (Luke). The findings suggest that participants who decided to ringfence meetings with their mentor found the time because they saw its value. Similarly, the findings reveal that mentors were flexible and amenable to finding workable solutions to scheduling meetings. The following quotes illustrate this collaborative approach taken within mentoring dyads to find scheduling solutions:

Due to the pressures of the first term, I found it challenging to schedule the first few meetings with my mentor. We eventually agreed to meet online and decided on a meeting schedule for the year. In the end, we had three online meetings and two face-to-face meetings (Mathew).

My mentor was very flexible in arranging venues and times for our meetings. We initially agreed on a schedule of meetings but could not keep to it due to work and life situations. Nonetheless, we did create opportunities to catch up and have discussions (Thomas).

When asked about the challenge of finding time to engage in the mentoring process, focus group participants were unanimous in the view that time was precious and limited but that the challenge was not insurmountable. Focus group participants also spoke about the necessity of setting aside time for mentoring sessions by identifying ways to coordinate their schedule with their mentor to protect mentoring time. Anne elaborates on this point, noting: 'you need to pull yourself away from your desk and realise that mentoring time is an investment in your practice and your wellbeing'. A similar strategy was adopted by Ciara, who comments that she blocked out time in her diary to schedule mentoring meetings; she added, 'I see these meetings with my mentor, like any other meeting. I don't view them as optional or some kind of extracurricular activity'. Several participants echoed the importance of reserving time for mentoring.

Particularly revealing is how participants indicate the need to be respectful of mentoring time and to be prepared for meetings. Several participants expressed the importance of ensuring their mentoring conversations were meaningful and relevant to improving student learning. One participant explicitly refers to the allocation of time for mentoring conversations. Jillian recalling one of her initial mentor conversations notes:

My mentor recommended that specific issues in relation to management and administrative issues could be responded to by email, text or phone call. He suggested that we ringfence our face-to-face meetings to focus our discussions on topics that focus on teaching and learning.

Similarly, Annette and Niall agreed with their respective mentors to discuss issues related to teaching and learning at face-to-face mentoring meetings while designating technical and managerial matters to email correspondence and phone conversations.

Relating to the challenge of protecting mentoring time, several participants were aware of the competing demands on mentors and were anxious not to overburden them. Two participants raised the concern that if they asked their mentors to review draft policies or documents without advance notice, it might increase mentors' stress and pressure. As Jillian notes:

> You cannot attend a mentoring meeting and be a fly on the wall, it is essential to bring some analysis with you and then your mentor can provide their analysis.

This quote highlights other commonly reported issues about protecting time for mentoring – being prepared for mentor meetings, being punctual, and taking responsibility for 'driving the mentoring conversation' (John).

Participants in this study saw their mentoring time as necessary and indispensable. Many view time commitment to mentoring as an investment in their professional development that can 'improve opportunities that promote student learning' (Annette) and promote 'collaborative practice that enhances the learning experience for students' (Jillian). Others use expressions such as 'mentoring time is my time' (John) or 'mentoring time is sacred and non-negotiable' (Mathew) when reflecting on the importance of scheduling time for mentoring.

Furthermore, several participants comment that expanding the mentoring relationship from one to two or more years would be beneficial. Anne reflects that one year was not sufficient because, 'it is only in your second year that you see the results of your mentoring activities and then you can make changes to your plans to improve them'. Mary recalls that she only realised the real benefit of mentoring when the process was ending. Likewise, Thomas comments that one year is too short for mentoring, suggesting that a minimum of two years is required 'to allow new principals to settle into their role and engage in meaningful conversations about impactful leadership practices'. A common view among participants is that more time is required with a mentor to build efficacy in improving teaching and learning.

The data implies that the more focus there is on learning opportunities, the easier it is for participants to motivate themselves and commit to mentoring. The findings show that mentee and mentor motivation directly influence participants taking steps to protect mentoring time.

Summary

These three subthemes - mentee expectations, perceived motivation of mentors and protecting mentoring time suggest that when participants want to learn and grow (Dweck, 2008), they will be motivated to reflect on their leadership practice and the more benefit they will achieve from participation in the mentoring programme. Referring to the earlier discussion (section 3.3.4), the more participants perceive their mentor a 'good' match, the more they will engage in the mentoring.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter presents findings from semi-structured individual interviews (ten participants) and a focus group (four participants), exploring the role of mentoring in developing the LfL practices of NAPs. My theoretical framework guided this study, *the leadership mentoring framework* (figure 3.8) framed from the analysis of policy documents (Chapter two), LfL literature, mentoring literature, and SCLT (Chapter three). Participants shared their perceptions and insights of mentoring and how these experiences influenced their leadership practices.

The findings show that trust and confidence were crucial in the formation of effective mentoring relationships. These mentoring relationships became a two-way interaction that supported NAPs to push beyond the managerial and administrative issues to develop leadership practices focused on improving teaching and learning. Another finding relates to the effectiveness of modelling and observation as key mentoring activities that supported NAP's LfL practices. For example, the sharing of learning experiences within mentoring dyads was significant because learning experiences often mirror the leadership practices of both the mentor and the mentee (Hayes, 2019). Hence, it was important for mentees to compare their current leadership practices with those of their mentor and see how their mentor served as a leader of learning and then reflect on similar experiences in their own campus. Spending time together, observing and collaborating was critical to the development of NAPs' LfL practices.

The importance of reflection echoes throughout the findings. Several participants commented on the importance of reflection as part of their mentoring experiences. These results suggest that mentors who are skilled at critically reflecting in their own experiences are best at modelling reflection for their mentee.

Much attention has been afforded to the exploring of the barriers to mentoring in the literature, such as the lack of time and scheduling (Clayton et al., 2013). Similarly, this study also identified participants' motivation and the matching of the mentor and mentee as factors that had significant

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influence on mentoring relationships. In conclusion, the recurring intersections between elements of the themes and subthemes point to the diversity of mentoring experiences suggesting that mentoring can support the development of LfL practices of NAPs. The following chapter presents key insights from this research and considers the applicability of these understandings for current and future professional development opportunities for school leaders.

Chapter 6
Discussion and Conclusion

6.1   Introduction

The role of the principal has become increasingly complex and challenging over recent decades (Bush, 2018; Coolahan et al., 2017; Sugrue, 2015). This complexity has resulted in increased attention being given to principal professional development programmes due to the recognition that preparing and developing school leaders cannot be left to chance (Earley, 2020; Bush, 2018). NAPs are required to lead in all aspects of management while concurrently being the leader of learning in their school (MacBeath et al., 2018; Hallinger 2011; Southworth, 2009; Murphy et al., 2007). NAPs need to be prepared to respond to these challenges and mentoring can be an ideal context for embedding leadership theory, practice, and reflection (Daresh, 2004; Young et al., 2005). While the previous chapter presented the findings under a range of themes and subthemes, this chapter unpacks and critically analyses the findings to provide a fresh understanding of the influence of mentoring on NAPs' LfL practices.

Analysing this study's significance, the first section of this chapter presents six key insights that address the main findings. Each insight represents an area of knowledge considered essential for supporting NAPs' LfL practices through mentoring. These key insights are presented through the lens of my theoretical framework, *the leadership mentoring framework*, and this study's findings, providing practical and theoretical implications for mentoring NAPs. The following section considers this study's contribution to knowledge, acknowledging that a significant gap exists in empirical research that explores how mentoring supports the development of principals' LfL practices. Following an overview of the limitations of this study the recommendations for policy, support services and participants in mentoring programmes are presented. In conclusion, several areas relating to mentoring NAPs and leadership development are identified for future research.

6.2   Key insights

The findings of this study confirm that mentoring is valued by participants and that mentoring is a promising method for improving NAPs' leadership practice. This finding aligns with previous research (Oplatka and Lapodot, 2017; Spillane and Lee, 2014; Daresh, 2007) supporting the contention that the entry of NAPs into the profession is not a one-time event. The process is a transitional one in which the focus of mentoring should be on guiding the NAP instead of a problem-solving intervention methodology.

Throughout the research process (policy analysis, literature review, data collection and analysis), the findings were connected to the dimensions of LfL and the dimensions of mentoring. SCLT, encompassing the sources of self-efficacy (enactive mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience and physiological and affective states), provided the theoretical bridge between LfL and mentoring. From this process, I present six key insights (figure 6.1) that address the main research question of this study: *how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning*? The key insights do not stand alone; instead, each one is dependent and related to the other, recognising the reality of the challenging, inspiring and sometimes daunting role of the school principal. Each insight represents important considerations when engaging with mentoring to support the leadership practices of NAPs. The following paragraphs explore each key insight in turn.

Figure 6.1   Key insights
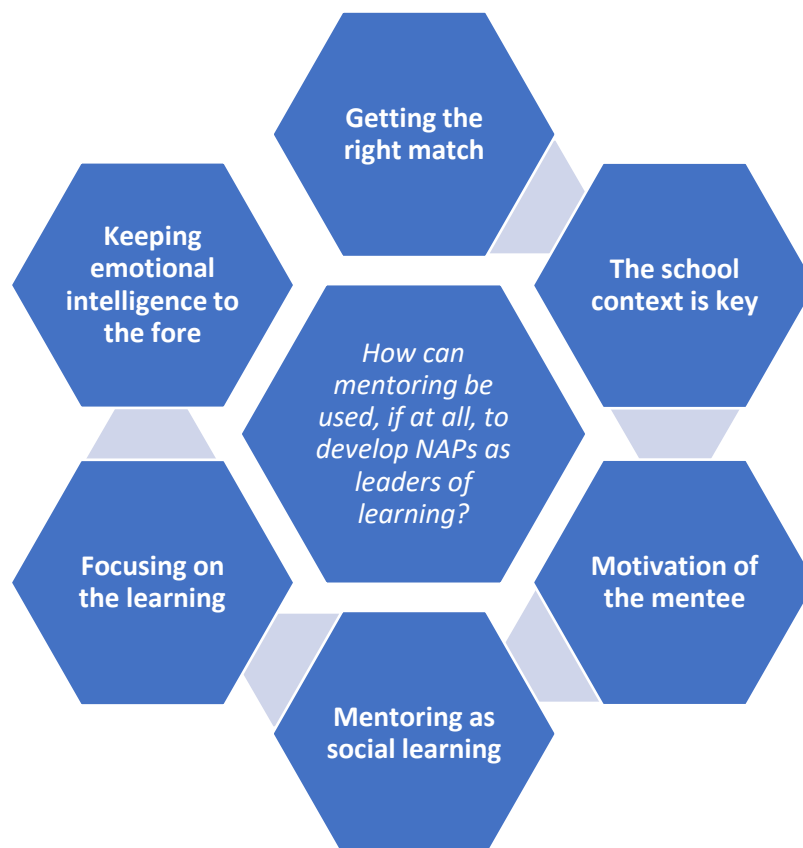
6.2.1   Getting the match right

The matching between the mentor and mentee is crucial for the success of mentoring, in particular, a recognition that the mentor and mentee need to be ready and willing to engage in mentoring conversations that focus on LfL practices (Hayes, 2019; Ragins, 2016; Alderfer, 2014).

This study reveals a strong connection between effective mentoring that supports the development of LfL practices of NAPs and the educational and emotional matching with the mentor and mentee. When mentees and mentors are matched, variables such as interpersonal styles, personal goals, educational philosophy, school context, and learning needs are key influences that come into play during mentoring conversations. This has implications for programme organisers as they consider who mentors should be and how they should be matched with mentees (Ragins, 2016). For example, when participants perceived a good match with their mentor, this led to high satisfaction levels with the mentoring process. Likewise, participants indicate that good matching increased reciprocal connections, possibly because these relationships are founded on shared interests and goals and nurture over time and are more likely to result in personal and professional learning (Alderfer, 2014).

Supporting Oplatka and Lapodot (2017), this study suggests that good matching between mentor and mentee results in self-growth and exploration of leadership issues of concern to both parties, in particular issues that improve teaching and learning. For example, several participants found it beneficial to reflect on their mentor's educational philosophy and professional experience when discussing the importance of the school vision (section 5.2.2). In this context, when mentees sense a similar educational philosophy with their mentor, creating and sharing ideas about the school vision provides a basis for professional dialogue regarding LfL practices (Reitzug et al., 2008). Likewise, mentoring conversations provide opportunities for mentees to contemplate different leadership approaches that support LfL, such as shared leadership, classroom observation, feedback to teachers, policy creation and teacher collaboration (section 5.3.1).

Conversely, when participants felt there was no educational, professional or personal matching with their mentor, the scope and type of topics discussed were mainly concerned with technical, administrative and managerial issues rather than topics that sought to enhance the learning experience for students. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that poor matching may engender apathy and frustration on the part of the mentee (section 5.2.2.). Interestingly, the study also acknowledges the need for mentees to have the opportunity to engage with mentors whose educational ideologies differ in some way from their own to generate new perspectives and constructive dialogue. The findings suggest that careful consideration needs to be given to ensuring that the mentee perceives their mentor as a good match as this perception can significantly impact the quality of the mentoring relationship (Daresh, 2004). Another key finding of the study is the importance of trust within mentoring relationships.

One of the main goals of mentoring is to provide NAPs with a trusted confidante as they transition into the principal's role (Tschannem-Moran, 2014). Participants in this study sought support, encouragement, affirmation, information, and understanding during the mentoring process. Supporting previous research, this study shows that the most foundational aspect of forming supportive relationships is developing trust between the mentor and mentee (Opengart and Bierema, 2015; Young at al., 2005; Salovey et al., 2004; Daresh, 2004). While there are inconsistencies in the discourses and different constructs of mentoring relationships presented in the findings, all participants express the need to trust their mentor to share leadership practices that improve teaching and learning (Zachary, 2009). Participants mentioned how trusting their mentor allowed them to show vulnerability and, more importantly, implement various leadership approaches that sought to improve student learning (section 5.3.1). In general, when mentees perceived the establishment of trust within the mentoring relationship, they were more willing to reveal their anxieties, concerns, and aspirations about their leadership practices (Zachary and Fisher, 2009). For most participants, this opened up mentoring conversations that sought creative approaches to enacting LfL practices that supported student learning.

The findings align with previous research indicating that **getting the match right** can support the development of trust and promote positive mentoring relationships through listening, collaboration, and building confidence among participants (Young et al., 2006; Daresh, 2004). When a trusting relationship is established, leadership practices that focus on improving student learning become the focus of mentoring work.

6.2.2   The school context is key

Effective mentoring of NAPs is a crucial influence in sustaining school leadership that is focused on improving student learning (Daresh, 2007; Young et al., 2005). The mentor needs to spend sufficient time appreciating the unique context of the mentee's school to help the NAP identify effective leadership practices that support students' learning. This study suggests that for mentoring to be effective in developing NAPs' LfL practices, mentoring conversations must be embedded within the teaching and learning context of the mentee's school.

As part of mentoring conversations, much of what participants identify as strategies or supports were what literature terms '*leading teaching and learnin*g' (Hallinger, 2011; Swaffield and MacBeath, 2009; Murphy et al., 2007). While I was able to determine this LfL dimension in participants' responses, the principals were not keen on labelling what they do as 'managing' curriculum and

assessment programmes (figure 3.3); instead, many expressed the view that management is separate from what they do as leaders of learning. Therefore, it is likely safe to infer that mentoring conversations support NAPs in 'management roles' regarding curriculum and assessment, even if they did not explicitly categorise them as 'management roles'.

All participants in this study made it clear that, as far as they were concerned, they were not the only leaders of learning in their school. The findings suggest that mentoring conversations reflect this mindset of fostering leadership qualities in others, building capacity and development (section 5.3.2). Studies have shown that when principals demonstrate these behaviours, teachers see themselves as influencing the strategies that improve teaching and learning (Earley, 2020; Neumerski, 2012; Southworth, 2009) since teachers are directly connected to student success (Leithwood et al., 2019). Mentoring conversations reveal the commitment of NAPs to strengthen teachers' performance through professional development (Murphy et al., 2007), demonstrating a commitment to this dimension of LfL. Furthermore, participants attribute their heightened focus on professional development and building capacity to collaboration with their mentor. Several participants note mentoring discussions as a learning process to reimagine and reinforce their previously held judgement that teachers need to be in a place where they are confident in learning from others. Furthermore, mentoring conversations did not spend significant time collaborating on discipline issues; instead, participants sought feedback on different strategies and approaches that improved teaching and learning within their own school. A common thread in the findings was the importance of keeping the focus on teaching and learning (Timperley, 2011).

One topic that did not receive significant attention was the effective use of data or other forms of evidence to advance student learning (Hallinger and Murphy, 2013; Levin, 2010). Surprisingly, participants did not report addressing the mentor to seek out the type of support needed to engage with a variety of data and research to influence decisions. This might be explained by participants' engagement with formal and informal professional supports provided by the PDST and management bodies.

This study shows that spending time with their mentor, **focusing on the school context**, collaborating, and sharing experiences is crucial to participants' success and growth (Searby, 2014; Zachary, 2000). This implies that mentoring requires time to embed and allow for collaboration between the mentee and mentor. Hence the expectation for mentoring needs to include sufficient time that provides for sharing experiences.

6.2.3 Motivation of the mentee

Although mentoring is characterised as a mutual learning partnership (Zachary, 2000), this study highlights the importance of mentees taking the initiative in seeking opportunities to enhance their leadership practices. When participants view the relationship as a two-way, power-free, and mutually beneficial experience, the result is a sharing of leadership that can develop mentees' LfL practices. The implication here is that mentees need to recognise their learning needs and communicate them effectively. Hence, as evidenced in the findings, mentees need to regularly articulate their learning needs and strengths as this can add to the quality of the mentoring relationship (Daresh, 2004) and ultimately develop LfL practices.

Under the premise that the mentee is 50% responsible for the mentor-mentee relationship (Zachary, 2009), NAPs need to become aware of the attitudes, behaviours and competencies that will maximise the benefits of mentoring. These attributes include taking the initiative, having a learning orientation, being goal orientated and reflective (Searby, 2014). This study suggests that NAPs' qualities and mindset can influence the creation and development of the mentoring relationship and knowing them may be useful for NAPs before they commit to mentoring. Furthermore, the motivation of the mentor was noted by several participants as a key determinant in creating a successful mentoring relationship (section 5.5.2). Supporting Bandura (1986) this study suggests that individuals are engaged in their own development and therefore can affect their own actions.

An example of how mentees articulated their learning needs was evident during mentoring conversations that evaluated different leadership strategies that improve student learning. Successes were acknowledged, while mistakes were assessed to learn from the experience. In the end, for all participants who provided examples, the decision was left to the mentee. The findings support Zachary (2005) who contends that mentees maximise the benefit from mentoring when they take an active role and become more self-directed.

Mentees' motivation is also reflective of the time they were willing to commit to the mentoring process. Several participants referred to mentoring time as something to be protected within their work schedule (Daresh, 2004). If the time spent was productive, such as focusing on leadership practices that improved teaching and learning, participants were not only willing but committed to 'ringfencing' mentoring time. Many participants view time commitment to mentoring as an investment in their professional development (section 5.5.3). However, one of the key challenges for participants was finding the opportunity to 'pull yourself away from the job' (Annette) and create

time to engage in mentoring. The challenge of protecting mentoring time was responded to in various ways by participants, often with the mentor's support rescheduling the meeting or utilising online platforms.

Interestingly, this study did not identify any reference to isolation or loneliness that may accompany NAPs (Oplatka and Lapidot, 2017). This may be explained by the fact that all participants had mentors, were members of their respective management bodies and built up supportive professional relationships with local principals. Nonetheless, lessening any sense of isolation, several participants acknowledge their mentor's aptitude to listen attentively by providing a 'listening ear' and a willingness to pursue conversations that sought to share professional experiences that were effective in improving student learning.

Also, what was absent in the findings was any specific reference to previous leadership experience. Nine participants had experience in the role of deputy principal. Surprisingly, this previous leadership experience did not have an influence on their decision to engage in mentoring or did it have a significant influence on mentoring conversations. Instead, the study shows that all participants saw mentoring as an opportunity to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and adjust their leadership approach to improve teaching and learning.

Supporting previous research, this study found that when mentees dedicate consistent time to mentoring, they increase their efficacy as leaders of learning (Hayes, 2019; Gumus and Bellibas, 2016).

6.2.4   Mentoring as social learning

This study shines a light on the relationship between LfL, mentoring and SCLT and joins the ranks of studies that confirm the effectiveness of social learning. SLCT (Bandura, 1986) contends that individuals learn new behaviours through self-efficacy, a process that involves acknowledging success (*enactive mastery*), feedback (*verbal persuasion*), observation and modelling (*vicarious experience*), and mindset (*physiological and affective states*), (section 3.4.1). Due to the nature of mentoring as a collaborative process, it is important that an acceptable environment (social context) is established for good relations between the mentor and the mentee. The evidence from this study demonstrates that mentors were vital to creating an acceptable environment (social context) for good relationships with mentees where learning became a socialisation process (Crow, 2001) that supported the development of NAPs' LfL practices.

The findings show that participants learn and acquire knowledge through interacting with and observing their mentor. Also, participants referred to increased self-efficacy levels, indicating increased confidence in engaging with leadership practices that improve teaching and learning. In line with Bandura's (1986) SLCT, this study reveals that mentoring support mentees in self-reflection and development that influences their leadership practices. The findings suggest that the four sources of self-efficacy are evident in certain mentoring activities that support the development of NAPs' LfL practices. The mentoring activities that participants found most effective include modelling, feedback, reflection and questioning.

Prior research (Scott, 2010) suggests that mentors who model good leadership behaviours and have a clear understanding of instructional practices that improve teaching and learning tend to be ideal in supporting NAPs' LfL practices. This is also true for participants in this study, as several acknowledged the opportunity to reflect on their mentor's leadership strategies (*vicarious experience*). Modelling was effective as a learning guide when mentors demonstrate the target tasks and, more importantly, elucidate their actions and reasoning. Mentors regularly used modelling to elucidate activities that supported LfL activities, such as promoting a positive school environment, building and developing relationships and shared leadership (section 5.3.2). The study reveals that such activities can support how mentees engage in mentoring conversations to further their own understanding of leadership practices that improve student learning. This study echoes the work of Crow (2001), who suggests that creative strategies shared and modelled by mentors can be drawn upon by mentees and ultimately establish new patterns of behaviour that support their leadership practice.

Feedback was also a key determinant of effective mentoring (Augustine-Shaw and Liang, 2016; Merriam and Bierema, 2014). Several participants view feedback as crucial to their reflective practices, with many commending their mentor's listening and observation skills. Supporting Beattie et al. (2016), this study's findings highlight the importance of focused feedback that encourages self-reflection and self-evaluation for participants. The importance of feedback and reflection echo through the interviews (*verbal persuasion*). Reflection was the primary objective in feedback conversations to bridge the gap between mentoring conversations and the day-to-day practicalities of a school leader that focused on improving student learning. The findings suggest that focused feedback supports NAPs to gauge their ability to perform specific leadership tasks accurately, particularly using emotional awareness when collaborating with key stakeholders (*physiological and affective states*).

Furthermore, this study suggests that mentoring can encourage reflection that supports mentees' reflective practice and theoretical understandings of leadership practices that improve student outcomes (*enactive mastery*). As with the previous insights, the implication here is the significance of allowing sufficient time for reflection to improve leadership skills (Searby, 2014). We should note the advice provided by Barnett and O'Mahony (2002:58), who suggest, 'If principals act without reflecting, they respond to daily pressures. If principals reflect without acting, they only maintain the status quo. But if principals can ~~learn~~ to reflect on their actions, they become proactive leaders who improve teaching and learning'.

Participants also refer to effective questioning as a useful strategy used by mentors. Several participants describe a compelling question as open-ended, capable of encouraging principals to reflect on their actions, judgments and emotions. This study indicates that mentors' questions were used to identify the needs of NAPs and encourage reflection on leadership practices and decision making. The use of questioning was a commonly used activity practised by mentors. The research of Zachary (2009) supports the notion that mentors are guides who help develop mentees into strong leaders by asking the right questions. None of this is possible without the creation of an acceptable social environment that supports dialogue between the mentor and mentee (Bandura, 1997).

Reflecting the sources of self-efficacy (figure 3.7), in general, this study reveals that participants experience mentoring as a form of social learning where they learn from the mentor's activities (Crow, 2001). For example, following mentoring conversations, several participants note an increase in confidence in working with teachers to improve teaching and learning through feedback, developing professional learning communities, sharing leadership, and creating opportunities for collaborative discussions focused on teaching and learning (section 5.3).

These findings support Knowles' (1984), who posits that adults learn experientially. Perhaps the theoretical message here is that mentoring can be viewed as a form of social learning that supports the development of NAPs' LfL practices when describing and visualising situations and nurturing conversations that promote ongoing reflection (Bandura, 1977b).

6.2.5   Focusing on the learning

Learning is central to mentoring (Young et al., 2005) and a core element in LfL (Seashore, 2015). However, the learning philosophies underpinning each concept is different. Mentorship is a 'partnership of learning' where both the mentor and mentee develop throughout the relationship

(Young et al., 2005:2). Learning is learner-focused and contextualised within the relationship to allow individual development, including the interpersonal competencies of self-reflection, active listening, empathy and feedback (Kram, 1985). For several scholars, this contrasts with the learning associated with LfL where the discourse of 'leading learning' has been reduced into monitoring attainment and sometimes viewed narrowly through the lens of reducing attainment gaps (Biesta, 2016; Smyth and Wrigley, 2013; Dimmock, 2012). However, this study's findings suggest that the 'disconnect' between the two learning concepts is not as pronounced as one might first think.

The findings reveal that participants experience mentoring as opportunities to reflect on DL practices to create learning at all levels, including student, teacher and leadership learning. Several participants engaged in mentoring work exploring a shared leadership approach to support learning for all within the school community rather than focusing on specific outcomes that focus on student attainment (section 5.2.2). This, it can be argued, is the best way of improving those outcomes because it relies on interacting comprehensively with one's environment rather than simply remembering discrete elements of it (Townsend et al., 2013:83). This study suggests that mentoring can promote a shared leadership approach that seeks a deeper understanding of learning for students, teachers and school leaders that moves beyond the 'narrow' view of learning, often associated with LfL, towards one that empowers teachers and students to reach their potential. To put it simply, one where school leaders enact LfL practices that improve outcomes and not only in relation to attainment.

Furthermore, the study raises critical questions concerning the current and future policy direction of DL and how it might be operationalised within LfL. The findings reveal challenges for school leaders to balance the strong desire to be involved in classroom practice on the one hand and fostering shared leadership on the other. The findings suggest that this needs to be negotiated internally by exploring creative and innovative changes and leadership configurations that would significantly improve teaching and learning. Moreover, the constant pressure of the terminal exam requires school leaders to balance the more traditional teaching and learning practices that respond to the accountability climate (section 2.4) with the desire to provide students and teachers with learning experiences that enable them to reach their potential.

6.2.6 Keeping emotional intelligence to the fore

Across all interviews, a significant finding was that mentoring conversations identify the importance of emotional awareness for school leaders. School leaders do not live in an isolated world of

mentoring or LfL; rather, the world of the school principal encompasses the juggling of tensions, stresses, conflicts and dilemmas, which renders emotional intelligence significant in empowering NAPs to meet the challenges encountered in their role as leaders of learning. For participants, this awareness was primarily focused on the work of building relationships and facilitating others thoughts and concepts in relation to initiatives that sought to improve student outcomes (section 5.4).

The findings support previous research (Harris, 2013; Brennan and MacRuairc, 2011; Cherniss, 2007), indicating that the quality of staff relations influences the decisions and actions of NAPs. In other words, mentoring conversations identified emotional intelligence as underpinning a significant array of the school principals' work. Furthermore, to enact change, many expressed consistent emphasis on their situational awareness and openness for relating to others and how mentoring conversations identified the significance of being equipped with social skills to deal with stakeholders.

This study supports Corrie (2009) who contends that challenges facing school leaders can be reduced through the development of improved emotional intelligence skills. Furthermore, the findings provide further support for researchers who have indicated that emotional intelligence can be developed to enhance NAPs' leadership skills (Opengart and Bierema, 2015; Harris, 2013). Corrie (2009) indicates that school leaders with a high level of emotional intelligence demonstrate leadership skills related to self-awareness and motivation of self and others, which ultimately assist in shaping a school's performance and development. Supporting Bush (2011b), the findings indicate that if school leaders are to be leaders of learning, they need to demonstrate multifaceted roles that inevitably require emotional intelligence.

6.3   Aligning the key insights with the theoretical framework of this study

This study explored how mentoring can be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning? The previous section presented six key insights through the lens of the *leadership mentoring framework* developed for this study. Connecting the dimensions of LfL and the dimensions of mentoring through SCLT, specifically the four sources of self-efficacy: enactive mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1987), this framework establishes how mentoring can influence the development of LfL practices as a form of social learning. Figure 6.2 provides a visual representation of the six key insights and how they align to this study's theoretical framework.

Figure 6.2   Six key insights: Alignment with the leadership mentoring framework
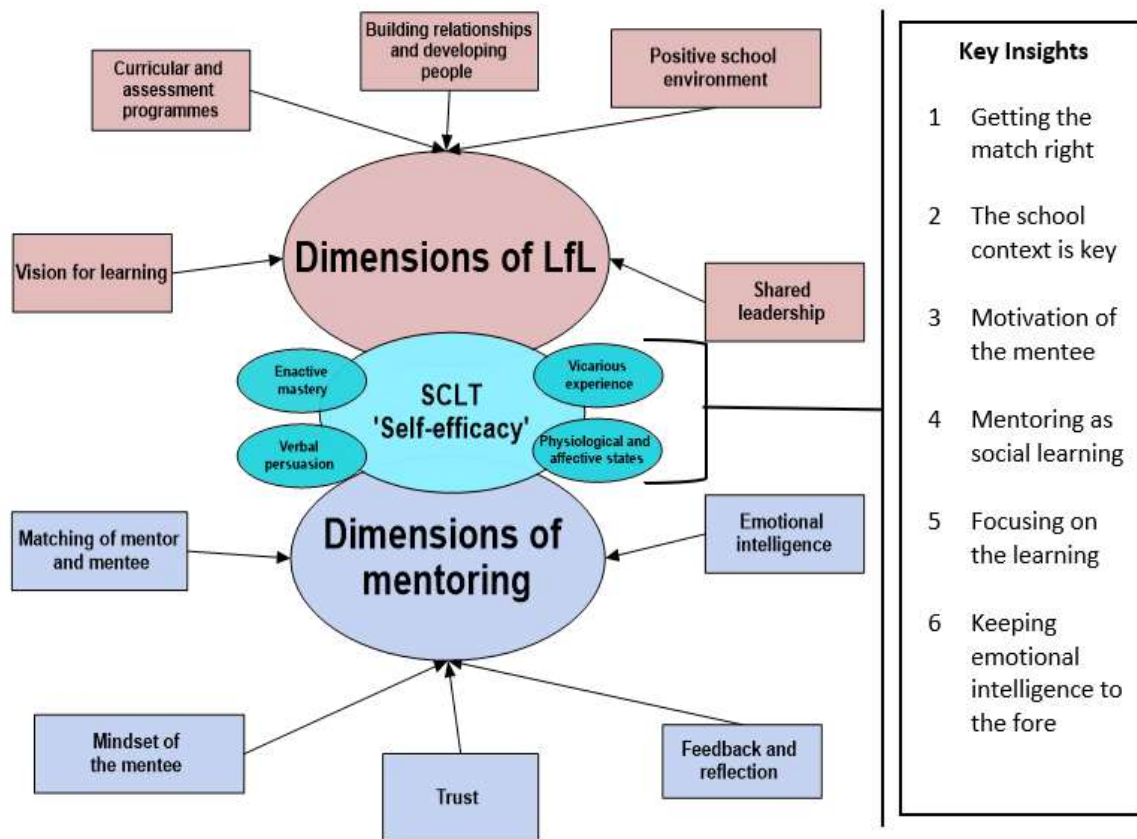
For example, the key insight 'getting the match right' can influence building trust within mentoring relationships. The development of trust promotes a mentee's self-efficacy through verbal persuasion and vicarious experience that fosters mentoring conversations that focus on improving student learning as opposed to technical and administrative issues. Similarly, a mentee's motivation to engage in mentoring activities that promote LfL can be advanced through mentoring conversations that celebrate enactive mastery and nurture verbal persuasion. From this understanding, we can surmise that mentoring as a form of social learning can support the development of NAPs' LfL practices. Furthermore, this framework can be used to explore and further enhance the mentoring experience of school leaders.

6.4   Contribution to knowledge

The case for specific leadership professional development is linked to the evidence that the quality of leadership is vital for improving student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2009). Avolio, (2005:2) makes a compelling case for leadership development based on the view that leaders are 'made not born' but acquire the necessary skills through learning. Recent educational reforms, outlined in chapter

two, highlight the need for Irish post-primary school principals to be capable of leading instruction that is 'focused on creating and sustaining environments conducive to good learning' while keeping the focus on 'the school's core work: learning and teaching' (DES, 2016c:7). Within this context, this research provides new understandings of the influence of mentoring on the development of NAPs' LfL practices in the Republic of Ireland.

The body of international research on leadership development for NAPs has grown considerably over recent decades (Bush, 2018); however, according to Nicholas and West-Burnham (2016), the bulk of leadership development and training opportunities focus on the technical and organisational. From an Irish perspective, there is a growing body of research reflecting the impetus to expand the literature taking into account the context and structures in which Irish school leadership operates (Murphy, 2019). However, save for work carried out by Forde (2019) and the CSL (2020c), the only objective study in relation to mentoring NAPs is a recent DE commissioned report (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2018) to research the role of the CSL and evaluate its progress. This mixed-method research study provides some valuable insights into the work of CSL, particularly the CSL mentoring programme; however, the terms of reference of the research do not provide for an in-depth analysis of the influence of mentoring on NAPs' leadership practices. Responding to the need for further research in this area, this study sought to explore how mentoring can be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning? This study contributes to the current literature in two ways. Firstly, identifying mentoring as effective professional development of NAPs' leadership practices. Secondly, blending the dimensions of LfL and the dimensions of mentoring with SCLT, this research posits that mentoring dyads that implement the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1987) can successfully support the development of NAPs' LfL practices.

Utilising this study's theoretical framework, *the leadership mentoring framework,* this research presents a theoretical model to advance our understanding of mentoring and the transition of NAPs into their new role as leaders of learning. Hence, this model can be used to explore how mentoring can help build NAPs' knowledge through SCLT, specifically through self-efficacy influences.

This research also offers an innovative analytical and methodological approach to evaluating the development of LfL practices of NAPs. The choice of a sequential qualitative mixed-method design is an original approach to exploring NAPs' perceptions of mentoring. It also adds currency to the ongoing debate that a mixed-method approach can combine two or more qualitative methods

(Morse, 2010) as opposed to limiting mixed-methods to various combinations of qualitative and qualitative research and data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

In summary, the findings confirm previous research noting the positive influence of mentoring on NAPs' development (Clayton et al., 2013) by providing new insights and an enhanced understanding of the influence of mentoring on the development of NAPs' LfL practices.

6.5   Limitations

As with all research, this study has some potential limitations. One potential limitation was the use of interviews as my primary data collection method. This means that the data collected was limited to the answers provided by participants and depended on their honesty as they reflected on their professional experiences and perceptions. Participants may have their own biases that are reflected in the information they provided during the study. There was potential for someone to be unwilling to share their entire perspectives and to be completely candid. This situation was possible as some participants may have been anxious to protect the identity of their mentor.

The selection of participants was purposeful in nature; however, it depended on an awareness of the study participants' willingness to give of their time. Additionally, if a participant had a negative mentoring experience, there was a possibility he/she chose not to take part in the study. I conducted ten interviews and one focus, consisting of four participants, in support of this study. This means that I cannot claim any significant levels of generalisability or transferability regarding this study's findings. On reflection, I can see the value of broadening the interview cohort and opening it to principals from two or more CLS mentoring cohorts. This would enable a study to track participants' experiences and reflections over the course of the first critical years in the role.

Despite these limitations, it is hoped that this study will make a contribution to a developing body of research. Much of the findings of this research confirm the anecdotal evidence. It is hoped that this study can contribute to a much-needed research base on school leadership development which can be used to inform the direction of supports currently available for NAPs.

6.6   Recommendations for policy, support services and organisers of mentoring programmes, mentors and mentees

The recommendations developed in this section are established from the unique context of this study; as such, stakeholders should reflect on their unique context and needs while considering

these recommendations. Recommendations are divided into (a) macro recommendations – education policy, leadership programmes, (b) meso recommendations - support services and organisers of mentoring programmes and (c) micro recommendations – mentors and mentees.

Macro recommendations: educational policy, leadership programmes

1. The conceptualization of school leadership requires attention. This study has highlighted the challenges facing NAPs as they balance the desire to influence classroom practice with the DE's policy drive towards DL. The DE needs to address the construct of school leadership and how it is conceptualized in educational policy to take account of these tensions, ensuring that the central concern for school leaders is to improve teaching and learning, incorporating a broad range of ideas about how to do it. This could be achieved by engaging school leaders, possibly through the management bodies, to capture principals' perceptions of current policy and suggestions on ways to better enact DL in schools.

2. Educational policy is instrumental to supporting the professional development needs of NAPs. In Ireland, principals are guided by the *Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* (DES, 2016c) to evaluate school leadership practice. There is evidence that mentoring activities focused on LfL practices align closely with the 'leadership and management' dimension of the framework (appendix 6). Hence, future revisions of this document should ensure increased prominence of LfL practices, such as 'creating a vision for learning' and 'managing curricular and assessment programmes' allowing school leaders to identify and develop leadership practices that support teaching and learning that inform the school's SSE process.

3. At present, school leadership programmes (table 2.3) provide limited opportunities for mentoring. Third level colleges, supported by the DE, should consider expanding these programmes to provide formal mentoring experiences for participants that would provide enhanced learning experiences for participants.

Meso recommendations: support services, organisers of mentoring programmes

4. Matching the mentor with the mentee is crucial. The mentee and mentor should have some similarities about their educational outlook and school context (Alderfer, 2014). Before establishing a mentoring relationship, programme organisers should individually assess the needs of NAPs to understand their background, experiences and desired areas of growth. This could involve interviewing prospective mentees to identify their unique context and professional development needs. This growth assessment will help establish mentorship that will best suit their needs and guide the mentoring process.

5. Given the importance of self-efficacy in driving leader performance (DeRue and Ashford, 2010), implementing future mentoring programmes should focus on the sources of self-efficacy to support the leadership development of school leaders. This could be realised by upskilling mentors through the current mentor training provided by the PDST to enable mentoring dyads identify and suitably practice the four sources of self-efficacy.

6. When the mentor and mentee share learning experiences, the opportunities to discuss leadership practices that improve student learning grew. Hence, programme organisers should choose mentors who are recognised as leaders of learning by their peers and who have a willingness to share their leadership experiences. The selection of mentors should include these specific criteria.

7. Mentoring NAPs as leaders of learning needs to focus on the centrality of the school leader who keeps the focus on the learning, including whole school discussions about 'learning for what?' This will help avoid schools becoming 'examination factories' and encourage a more rounded education that encourages teachers and students to reach their potential. Therefore, mentoring time should focus on leadership practices that enhance learning experiences for all, and the more technical and administrative issues that NAPs have deal with during their first year could be addressed by the management bodies. To realise this, the PDST and CSL should identify such issues before NAPs commence mentoring and work with the management bodies to ensure these issues do not become the focus of mentoring conversations.

8. Emotions impact NAPs' roles and leadership practices. One recommendation from this study is the expansion of emotional intelligence concepts in mentoring programmes to ensure the emotional needs of NAPs are met through mentoring feedback conversations (Brennan and MacRuairc, 2011; Chun et al., 2010). The development of emotional awareness within the mentoring process will enable NAPs to use appropriate practices to promote a collaborative school environment that improves teaching and learning.

9. Mentor and mentee need to meet regularly to collaborate and work together. As such, NAPs need more than one year with their mentor to reflect on their professional practice and build self-efficacy in improving teaching and learning. Hence, organisers of mentoring programmes should engage in conversations with the DE, management bodies and other stakeholders with the view to establishing long-term mentoring relationships (two years or more).

10. The use of online platforms should be explored fully by the PDST and CSL to ensure ongoing communication between the mentor and mentee. This is especially true when face-to-face meetings are not practicable or possible. The induction programme for mentees and mentors

should include training in online platforms before the commencement of the mentoring programme.

11. To increase the opportunities for sharing leadership practices that support student learning, formal mentoring opportunities should be provided to teachers/school leaders by the PDST, management bodies, and the TCI and accessible for the duration of one's teaching career.

Micro recommendations: mentors and mentees

12. Mentees need to be proactive in seeking to take part in mentoring upon appointment. Similarly, they should Identify the skills, knowledge, and/or goals that they want to achieve and communicate them to their mentor and introduce new topics that are important at any point. Upon appointment, NAPs should sign up for mentoring, providing sufficient time to identify areas of interest that would benefit their leadership practices.

13. Mentors need to employ inclusive approaches to mentorship such as listening actively, modelling, reflection, providing feedback and effective questioning as part of mentoring engagements. Mentors should seek ongoing advice and support, ensuring confidence and competency in using these strategies through support services.

6.7   Recommendations for future study

This study joins an ongoing conversation about the influence of mentoring on the leadership practices of NAPs. To extend this conversation, this section recommends further research on the connection between mentoring and the development of leadership practices of school leaders.

(1) This design study was limited to 14 participants, all of whom completed the CSL mentoring programme. A natural progression of this work would be to include a more significant sample of mentees to give a more comprehensive understanding of mentoring leadership supports. Further studies could (a) include the perspectives of mentors, (b) include the perspectives of mentors and mentees simultaneously and (c) incorporate participants from two or more mentoring cohorts. Similarities and differences across various mentoring dyads could expand the knowledge base about the essential components of mentoring that support the development of leadership.

(2) Previous research on CSL mentoring for post-primary principals in Ireland has focused on leadership standards and quantitative surveys when measuring mentees' perceptions of the impact of mentoring on their leadership development (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2018). More qualitative studies are needed that focus on effective leadership practices, so we may gain

consistency in the quality of data, enhancing our understanding of how mentoring can support NAPs.

(3) Future studies should investigate the impact of research-based approaches that determine the quality of fit when matching the mentor with the mentee. As there is limited research within the Irish context, this warrants further investigation to explore effective matching mentor and mentee protocols.

(4) This study did not explore how mentoring supports provided to NAPs are perceived by others whom they lead. Future studies should consider principals' longitudinal professional growth perceptions from multiple sources, including teachers, students, and parents.

(5) Mentors also experience rewards from mentoring relationships and may benefit from the mentee's creativity and energy (Daresh, 2004). While findings from this study show how mentoring can support mentees' LfL practices, further study could assess the mentor's role as a learner in the process.

(6) This study employs SCLT as a theoretical lens to explore the influence of mentoring on the development of LfL practices of NAPs. Future research could utilise other learning theories to explore the development of NAPs' leadership practices. Moreover, because learning theories operate with different foci and aims, further research could use multiple theories to guide scholarship and mentoring programme development.

(7) Research focused on the perspectives of primary school principals in Ireland would provide opportunities to consider if different contexts affect the different variables found in this study.

6.8   Conclusion

There is increasing recognition that mentoring is a powerful tool to develop the professional practice of NAPs (Gumus and Bellibas, 2016; Daresh, 2004). Today's school leaders need to be 'constantly focused on the right stuff– the core technology of schools, or learning, teaching, curriculum, and assessment', and make all other dimensions of schooling work in the service of a more robust core technology and improved student learning (Murphy et al., 2007:179). This research confirms just how important it is to support NAPs in their role as leaders of learning. Employing *the leadership mentoring framework,* and based on this research, I argue that mentoring can support NAPs to build their capacity to push beyond the usual top-down managerial form of leadership practices to develop instruction-focused and supportive practices known to impact student outcomes (Clayton et al., 2013).

This research provides NAPs with supports, ideas, and different approaches that may guide their mentoring activities. Depending on the context, mentoring dyads could adapt some of the mentoring practices outlined in this study to positively impact teaching and learning. This study emphasises the significance of mentoring supports such as modelling and sharing leadership practices, feedback and reflection, and questioning as instrumental in developing NAPs' LfL practices. School leaders could apply this information to start an intentional dialogue with teachers about strategies and innovations that improve student outcomes. Also, principals could use this study's information to reflect on their own LfL practices and evaluate their own work. Likewise, the development of *the leadership mentoring framework* can be used or adapted by support services to enhance the current offering of supports for school leaders, improve the selection process and training of mentors and promote specific mentoring strategies that are proven to enhance the leadership practices of NAPs.

As a 13-year veteran principal for whom a mentoring programme was not available, I vividly recall the frustration, confusion, exhaustion, and fears as I transitioned into my new role without a mentor. In this study, participants' candid testimonials as they depicted the complexities and challenges of their first year on the job were balanced with the knowledge that they had mentoring supports to reduce feelings of weariness and anxiety. However, a mentoring programme's mere existence does not guarantee a positive impact on leadership development as NAPs socialise into their new roles and gain essential knowledge and skills. Ongoing planning and reflection are needed to implement an effective mentoring programme cultivating a culture of continuous leadership support filled with lifelong learning (Daresh, 2004).

Mentoring may not be the silver bullet to guarantee successful leadership development; however, this research has shown that it can provide practical support to promote the development of NAPs' LfL practices.

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Appendices

Appendix 1(a)

Ethical approval letter

MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY,
MAYNOOTH, CO. KILDARE, IRELAND

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary to Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

21 August 2019

Tiernan O'Donnell
Maynooth University Department of Education

Re: Application for ethical approval for a Project entitled: A study on the perceptions of newly appointed post-primary school principals on their acquisition of instructional leadership skills through mentoring

Dear Tiernan,

The above project has been evaluated under Tier 2 process, Expedited review and we would like to inform you that ethical approval has been granted.

Any deviations from the project details submitted to the ethics committee will require further evaluation. This ethical approval will expire on 31/08/2020.

Kind Regards,

Dr Carol Barrett
Secretary,
Maynooth University Research Ethics Committee

C.c. Dr Thomas Walsh, Maynooth University School of Education

Reference Number
SRESC-2019-087

Appendix 1(b)

Email sent by NAPD director of mentoring to principals who completed the 2018/2019 CSL mentoring programme.

September 2019

Dear Principal,

I hope the new school year has got off to a good start and that you are enjoying the job – at least some of the time! I am contacting you because you attended at least one of the group mentoring sessions organised by NAPD last year

Tiernan O Donnell, a doctoral student from Maynooth University, ███████████████ ████████████████████████████████ has asked me to forward the attached two documents to you, with a view to you participating in his research project as outlined in the Information and Consent form attached.

I have not passed on your name or any of your details to Tiernan and you are of course under no obligation whatsoever to participate. However, if you would like to engage with this important research please contact Tiernan directly via his e mail: tiernan.odonnell@mumail.com and he will be in touch with you in due course.

Yours sincerely,

███████████

(NAPD director of Mentoring)

Interview protocol
(Individual interview questions)

Review research questions

This study addresses the following overarching research question*: how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?*

My inquiry and reflection led to the development of the following embedded questions linked to the overall research question.

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of NAPs engaging in a formal mentoring programme?
2. How has participants' professional practice been influenced by their mentoring experience?

Background and get acquainted questions:

1. How are you today?
2. When were you first appointed to your current position?
3. Can you outline your teaching experience to date and any management/leadership positions you may have held?
4. Can you articulate why you decided to become a principal?
5. Apart from the CSL mentoring programme, what professional supports did you access to support when you were appointed a principal?
6. Can you identify the areas/issues you wanted support with at the start of the mentoring process?

Lead questions with supplementary questions:

1. *How did mentoring influence your ability to build a vision for learning in your school?*
   - Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have helped you build a vision for your school?
   - Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have helped you to establish goals for your school?

2. *How did mentoring influence your ability to support effective curriculum and assessment programmes in your school?*
   - Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have influenced your ability to support effective curriculum and assessment programmes in your school . Can you give any examples?

3. *How did mentoring influence your ability to demonstrate high expectation for your staff?*

- Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have influenced your ability to have high expectations for your staff. Can you provide examples?

4. *How did mentoring influence your ability to create shared leadership in your school?*
   - Can to elaborate what you believe to be the essential components of distributed/shared leadership? What does this look like in your school?
   - Can you talk about how your work with your mentor may have helped you promote a shared leadership approach in your school?

5. *How did mentoring influence your ability to provide professional stimulation and support for staff?*
   - Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have helped you to support staff in relation to their professional development needs. Can you give examples?

6. *How did mentoring Influence your ability to model best practice and critical organisational values?*
   - Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have influenced your ability to model best practice with your staff? Can you provide examples?
   - Can you describe how your work with your mentor may have influenced your ability to articulate crucial organisational values to your staff? Did your mentor support you in identifying these values? If so, can you provide examples?

7. *How did mentoring influence your ability to foster positive relations within the school community?*
   - Can you provide any examples how your mentor may have influenced your decisions in relation to buidling positive staff relations, can you give any examples?

8. *In your opinion, how effective was mentoring supporting you as a newly appointed principal?*
   - What aspects of the program made it successful or unsuccessful? Can you give examples?
   - Did aspects of the mentoring program not work for you? If so, can you give an example?
   - What extra support, if any, could you identify that would have enhanced the mentoring experience for you?

Appendix 3

Information sheet and consent form (Individual interviews)

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet (Interviews)

Purpose of the study. I am Tiernan O'Donnell, Ed. D student in the Department of Education, Maynooth University. A study on the perceptions of newly appointed post-primary school principals on their acquisition of instructional leadership skills through mentoring.

What will the study involve? The study will involve one-to-one interviews with participants reflecting on their experiences of the mentoring programme operated by the Centre for School Leadership (CSL). You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting up to one hour approximately. The one-to-one interview will focus on what participants perceive as instructional leadership skills acquired following completion of the CSL mentoring programme. The interview will take place at a time and place suitable to you between the months of October and December 2019.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval upon request.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you were a participant in the CSL mentoring programme during the last school year.

Do you have to take part? No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, I hope that you will agree to take part and give some of your time to participate in a one-to-one interview. It is entirely up to you to decide whether you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are anonymised. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected? The one-to-one interview will focus on participants' perceptions and understanding of their instructional leadership skills and how these leadership skills relate to their participation in the CSL mentoring programme.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. The interview session will be recorded and transcribed. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researcher's place of work. Electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on Maynooth University (MU) PC or servers and will be accessed only by myself, Tiernan O'Donnell. No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. All primary data will be irreversibly anonymised and retained of a period of ten years from publication. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you upon request. However, there are circumstances where data is required by law:

It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at my place of work in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After ten years, I will destroy all data. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by me in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as part of my EdD in the Autumn of 2021. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me as follows:
Tiernan O'Donnell,
Department of Education,
Maynooth University,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare.
Email: tiernan.odonnell@mumail.com

Supervisor Contact Details
Dr. Tom Walsh,
Maynooth University School of Education,
Floor Second,
Room 210.
Phone (01) 708 3351
Email thomas.walsh@mu.ie
If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the attached consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Consent Form

I...agree to participate in Tiernan O'Donnell's research study titled [A study on the perceptions of newly appointed post-primary school principals on their acquisition of instructional leadership skills through mentoring].

Please tick each statement below

The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me verbally and in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily.   ☐

I am participating voluntarily.   ☐

I give permission for my interview with Tiernan O'Donnell to be audio recorded   ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating.   ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to anonymisation of data.   ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.   ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet   ☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below: ☐

I agree to use of quotation/publication of extracts from my interview   ☐
I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview   ☐

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects   ☐
I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects   ☐

I agree for my data, once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive   ☐

Signed..   Date....................

Participant Name in block capitals ....

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that he/she could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited him/her to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed...   Date....................

Researcher Name in block capitals ....

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI

Appendix 4

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Interview protocol
(Focus group questions)

</div>

Review research questions

This study addresses the following overarching research question*: how can mentoring be used, if at all, to develop NAPs as leaders of learning?*

My inquiry and reflection led to the development of the following embedded questions linked to the overall research question.

Research Questions

1. What are the perspectives of NAPs engaging in a formal mentoring programme?
2. How has participants' professional practice been influenced by their mentoring experience?

The interview protocol was influenced by the main issues and dominant narratives from the individual interviews.

Lead questions with supplementary questions:

1. *How important was trust between you and your mentor during the mentoring programme?*
   - Can you describe how trust influenced the issues/topics that were discussed with your mentor?

2. *Where you happy with the matching process with your mentor?*
   - Do you think the matching process had any influence on the mentoring relationship? Can you give any examples?

3. *Did your mentor share professional learning experiences with you? If so, what issues/topics were discussed?*
   - Did these conversations support your leadership practices?

4. *How did the frequency of meetings influence your mentoring experience?*
   - Did the mentoring programme provide sufficient opportunities to enhance your leadership practices?

5. *Did mentoring support your engagement with stakeholders (teachers, students, parents) in any specific way?*
   - Did these conversations influence your leadership practices? Can you give examples?

5. *What were your expectations of mentoring*

- Can you outline what your expectations of mentoring were and if these expectations were met? Can you give some examples?

6. *Were there any challenges/concerns for you as you engaged in the mentoring programme?*
   - In hindsight, is there anything you would have done differently to get more out of the mentoring experience?

The following questions (as per individual interview protocol, appendix 2) were also asked of the focus group.

1. *How did mentoring influence your ability to build a vision for learning in your school?*

2. *How did mentoring influence your ability to support effective curriculum and assessment programmmes in your school?*

3. *How did mentoring influence the ability your ability to demonstrate high expectation for your staff and foster participation in school decisions?*

4. *How did mentoring influence your ability to create shared leadership in your school?*

5. *How did mentoring influence your ability to provide professional stimulation for staff?*

6. *How did mentoring Influence your ability to model best practice and critical organisational values?*

7. *How did mentoring influence your ability to foster positive relations within the school?*

8. *In your opinion, how effective was mentoring supporting you as a newly appointed principal?*

Appendix 5

Information sheet and consent form (Focus group)

![Maynooth University logo] National University of Ireland Maynooth

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Focus Group
Information Sheet

Purpose of the study. I am Tiernan O'Donnell, Ed.D student in the Department of Education, Maynooth University. I am undertaking research as part of my study into the development of instructional leadership skills of newly appointed secondary school principals.
The study is concerned with the acquisition of instructional leadership skills by newly appointed post-primary school principals following their completion of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) mentoring programme.

What will the study involve? The study will involve a focus group of between four and eight participants reflecting on their experiences of the mentoring programme operated by the CSL. The discussion for the focus group will revolve around the perceptions of participants experiences of the CSL mentoring programme in relation to instructional leaderships skills.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval upon request.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because you were a participant in the CSL mentoring programme during the last academic year.

Do you have to take part? No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to take part in this research. However, I hope that you will agree to take part and give some of your time to participate in the focus group. It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not you would like to take part. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are analysed. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with Maynooth University.

What information will be collected? The focus group interview will focus on what you perceive as instructional leadership skills acquired following completion of the CLS mentoring programme. The focus group will take place at a time and place suitable to all participants and during the months of January/February 2020.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on

Maynooth University (MU) PC or servers and will be accessed only by myself, Tiernan O'Donnell and my supervisor/external examiner. No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you upon request. All Primary data will be irreversibly anonymised and retained of a period of two years from publication. However, there are circumstances where data may be provided to a 3rd party:

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent."

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at my place of work in such a way that it will not be possible to identify you. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. After two years, I will destroy all data. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by me in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as part of my EdD in the Autumn of 2021. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I do not envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me as follows:
Tiernan O'Donnell,
Department of Education,
Maynooth University,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare.
Phone: 0872332702
Email: tiernan.odonnell@mumail.com

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the attached consent form overleaf. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Consent Form

I...agree to participate in Tiernan O'Donnell's research study titled [The acquisition of instructional leadership skills by newly appointed principals following completion of the CSL mentoring programme.].

Please tick each statement below

The purpose and nature of the study have been explained to me verbally and in writing. I've been able to ask questions, which were answered satisfactorily. ☐

I am participating voluntarily. ☐

I give permission for my interview with Tiernan O'Donnell to be audio recorded ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while I am participating. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to submission of research ☐

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request. ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet ☐

I understand that my data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission below: ☐

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐
I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

I agree for my data to be used for further research projects ☐
I do not agree for my data to be used for further research projects ☐

I agree for my data, once anonymised, to be retained indefinitely in the IQDA archive ☐

Signed.. Date...................

Participant Name in block capitals ....

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that he/she could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited him/her to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed...   Date....................

Researcher Name in block capitals ....

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Two copies to be made: 1 for participant, 1 for PI

Looking at our Schools 2016, A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools 2016 (DES, 2016c)

The statements of practice – Leadership and Management

Domain 1 Leading Teaching and Learning	Domain 2 Managing the Organisation	Domain 3 Leading School Development	Domain 4 Developing Leadership Capacity
Standards	**Standards**	**Standards**	**Standards**
Promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in learning, teaching, and assessment.	Establish an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication.	Communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realization.	Critique their practice as leaders and develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership.
Foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student.	Manage the school's human, physical and financial resources so as to create and maintain a learning organisation.	Lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation.	Empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles.
Manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum.	Manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness and justice.	Build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the wider community.	Promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation, and student leadership.
Foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and students' learning.	Develop and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability.	Manage, lead and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and to changes in education.	Promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation, and student leadership.