Exploring the factors that encourage postholders to engage in curriculum leadership.

A study of large primary schools.

Michael Maher

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Abbreviations and Translations

I.N.T.O. – Irish National Teachers Organisation.

I.P.P.N. – Irish Primary Principals Network.

O.E.C.D. – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

P.C.S.P. – Primary Curriculum Support Service.

S.D.P. – School Development Planning.

R.P.C.- Revised Primary Curriculum.

Cuiditheoir – Curriculum Facilitator with the Revised Primary Curriculum.

Tuairisc Scoile – School Evaluation Report.

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Chapter One

The National Context

It is difficult to reflect on the last ten to fifteen years in Irish education without noting the sheer volume of activity during that period with specific reference to educational review and subsequent legislation.

The OECD report on education (1991), The Review of the Role of The Principal by the I.N.T.O. (1991), The Report on the National Education Convention (1994), The White Paper on Education (1995), The Education Act (1998), The Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary School Principal (1998), The Education Welfare Act (2000) and the proposed Teaching Council (2003), all exemplify in some way the extent to which education is no longer the preserve of educators but open to a widening list of external publics with legitimate and vested interests in it's ongoing operation.

These reports and the ensuing legislation mentioned above, also demonstrate how our schools are increasingly being called upon to respond to changing societal circumstances and requirements. Break-up of the traditional family unit, employment needs of a knowledge-based society, integration of children with special needs, inclusion of a more multicultural population and greater accountability to the public are just some of the factors impacting on schools and school curriculum in recent years.

In this regard the public focus has attended, not only to developments in curriculum, teaching and learning, but has also caused us to examine school organizational structures and the nature of roles that various professionals play in the school. The implementation of the revised curriculum, which is ongoing since 1999, has added to an already busy workload for principals and in-school management.

The I.P.P.N document *The Value of Leadership?* , (2002) examined the principal's role in it's totality. It shows how the introduction of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme and the School Development Planning Initiative into schools, have highlighted the relevance of curricular leadership in the context of school improvement and the implementation of change. (2000, p.15)

Schools have been challenged to revisit the nature, form and scope of the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged. This review itself requires a deep appreciation of how curriculum evolves. Multiple and sometimes conflicting demands have pressured schools to find a form of leadership that empowers them, to develop organically as learning communities, and meet these challenges with confidence in what they are doing. Ongoing attention to our practices and the values underpinning them, within a culture of shared collaboration and mutual respect, challenges some of our traditional notions of schooling and leadership. Aspects of this newer form of leadership have been noted and increasingly referred to, in educational thinking both at home and abroad. To examine these developments further we need to look initially at how the context for school leaders and postholders has evolved in Ireland's primary schools.

A historical perspective

In recent years significant structural changes have occurred in respect of in-school management, with particular reference to the role of the school principal and the other post-holders. Yet, Ireland was slow to develop these structures and lagged behind it's nearest neighbour (England) where the concept had been established at primary level in 1956 and almost 50 years earlier at second level.

In Ireland, prior to 1997, the management structure consisted of the following posts - Principal, Vice-Principal, Grade a post holder and Grade B post holder.

This system had it's origins in the Ryan Tribunal on teachers' salaries in 1968. Under the system post holders were paid a graded allowance for which they were required to carry out specific responsibilities assigned to them. Appointments to all posts including that of vice-principal were offered, assuming suitability, to the longest-serving applicant in the school. The extent to which these posts carried professional meaning with regard to teaching and learning is debatable, and in this context it is notable that six years elapsed before the Department of Education issued a listing of duties which might be suitable for delegation to these post holders.

New roles and responsibilities for school leaders.

With the advent of the Primary School Curriculum in 1971, the constraints of what had hitherto been a quite specific curriculum were loosened. New expectations and responsibilities for principals began to appear. An expansion of the principal's role now included planning, decision-making, curriculum development, instructional leadership, resource management, accountability, professional development, in-service provision and interpersonal and community relations. From what had been a largely bureaucratic and autonomous role the requirement to collaborate with staff was beginning to emerge. Within this context of increased responsibility the need for delegation was also becoming more apparent. The Department issued a Circular (16/73) which outlined fourteen duties that could be delegated to postholders. (Section C). While this list was never meant to be exhaustive, the duties outlined were primarily administrative and supervisory.

However, four of them did contain a curricular aspect.

2. The care and safe custody of school requisites, equipment and teaching aids.........
 7. Arrangements for talks and demonstrations and for visits to selected schools.........
12. Responsibility for organising particular areas of the curriculum throughout the school.........
13.Responsibility for a particular school activity e.g. games, choir, orchestra, drama etc..........

The individual nature of these duties reflected the perception of the teacher's role as classroom – focused while overall responsibility for curricular leadership, organisation and development was still left squarely on the shoulders of the principal. (Section B, 6-21)

With the establishment of Boards of Management (1975) and the development of Parents/Teacher Associations there gradually emerged a wider audience to whom the principal and the school were answerable. The increases in workload, responsibility and accountability were reflected in new perspectives on in-school management. The OECD report (1991, p.63) stressed the importance of developing a stratum of middle management in the larger schools. This reflected to some extent the need to assist the principal in co-ordinating and managing the activities of the whole school.

The Green Paper, *Education for A Changing World* (1992), broadened the discussion on the principal's role, suggesting a move from the concept of 'head' teacher to that of school leader.

The Report on the National Education Convention (1994, p.42) stated that:

> Research has identified a strong relationship between positive school leadership and institutional effectiveness, and describes the successful principal as providing skilled instructional leadership for the staff, creating a supportive school climate, with particular emphasis on the curriculum and teaching ...

Thus, while the Report highlighted the pivotal role of the principal in moving the school forward, it also portrayed a new dimension to the principal's role as facilitator to and developer of, staff leaders within a culture of lifelong learning.

Proposals in the White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) identified the need to match the duties in posts to the central tasks of the school and also encouraged greater collaboration and sharing of responsibility among teachers. They specifically identified the leadership aspect of the principal's role as it pertained to curriculum.

> Determining the school's educational aims and formulating strategies to achieve them. (p.148)
> Leadership of the school community. (p.151)
> Developing, in consultation with staff, the school's curriculum and assessment policies. (p.151)

As we look back through these developments we can see a greater focus emerging on the principal as curricular leader, whose success in this area would be determined by his/her capacity to share responsibility with postholders and staff, empowering them to lead.

Constraints on development

Herron points out however, in his research on these 'posts of responsibility', (1985, p.132), that, in practice, the duties delegated tended to be routine and administrative, rather than duties with a leadership orientation. As such these duties were not centred in teaching and learning and held little intrinsic motivation for teachers. Many teachers saw the posts as an additional long service increment. (1985, p.121) and highlighted the absence of a parallel system which might have acknowledged seniority, without being connected to post appointments.

The Report of the Primary Education Review Body (1990) highlighted the ongoing lack of a meaningful and supportive middle management structure for school principals.

> The Principal teacher will come under more and more pressure if he/she has to deal unaided with all school affairs. A rational distribution of tasks and responsibilities would relieve much of this pressure.(p.43)

The realities of daily life for many principals at this time were also clearly documented in a study of Irish second-level principals by Leader and Boldt (1994).

> A principal's day is punctuated by a variety of interventions and interactions with pupils, staff members, parents and others; these invariably involve responses to queries, problems, situations and minor crises.
> (Ch.7, p.95)

Here a picture emerges of the principal re-acting to the burdensome daily demands of the job with less emphasis on the longer-term leadership and planning functions. While administrative duties tended to be prioritised, principals were also seen to be involved with many 'low-value tasks' which the research describes as 'maintenance and janitorial in character'. (p.95)

Some of the commentary may highlight the lack of ancillary staff in the system, but it also suggests that the principal's role, as it was being carried out, was a model 'inappropriate to the challenges and responsibilities of principalship today'. (p.96) Even though instructional leadership and planning were seen by principals as functions to which *they ought to devote the most time*, with particular reference to staff and curriculum development, a number of factors prevented this happening.

Two of the key issues identified were the lack of 'a clearly defined role for the principal and clearly defined middle-management roles'. (p.96)

The OECD report (1991), points out that despite the existence of these posts

> An effective middle management capability scarcely exists...although substantial financial provision is available for responsibility posts, these posts haven't been used in practice to develop a strong middle management structure. This is a need that should be addressed. (p.108)

The existing 'posts of responsibility' system was heavily criticised by Stack in the Report on the National Education Convention (1994) (p.271). These criticisms included:

- A lack of clearly defined selection procedures.

- Differences and difficulties in relation to specification of functions.

- Limited discretion in the selection of candidates and in assigning duties to post holders.

- Little flexibility in matching posts to needs of schools.

- Unwillingness by post holders to accept any responsibility for the management of staff.

- No account of the fact that some of the functions associated with the management of schools cannot be deferred to that part of the day when teaching ends.

Stack had shone a light on the underlying frustrations of teachers, principals, parents and school Boards with the system as then constituted, which did not necessarily aid the promotion of the most able, interested and suited person to a post.

The failure to provide appropriate training, clarity and time for the post-holder, made it difficult to develop the post in a meaningful way, that supported teaching and learning in the school, and in some cases led to a culture of secrecy about what the actual duties were.

This mismatch between the posts system and the developmental thinking of the nineties, which was clarifying the new responsibilities for schools and school leaders,

only led to increasing tension for the principal at a time when societal, legislative and educational changes were gathering pace.

The Nineties and beyond

The Report on the National Education Convention (1994) acknowledged the role ambiguity in posts and suggested the creation of

> Senior teacher posts which assign responsibility and accountability to teachers for the academic and pastoral programmes in the school would reduce considerably the workload of the principal, who would then be freed to concentrate on the central aspects of management generally associated with this role... (p.52)

Awareness was also emerging of how leadership for school principals differed from the business models that existed. Attention to the attitudes and underlying values informing classroom practices in schools, were beginning to be identified as important in attempts at implementing and institutionalising change.

The Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary School Principal (1998, points out that

> Analysis and clarification of the role of Principal as instructional leader is crucially important...it is this aspect of the Principal's role that distinguishes it most sharply from leadership and management in other organisations and areas of endeavour. The Principal's role in leading the school towards the provision of the optimal learning conditions for the children is more than a management and administrative function. It requires an understanding of professional and educational leadership which is unique to education and schooling. (p.28)

However, as we will explore later, the responsibility for leadership may need to be devolved and shared if school leaders want to influence curriculum development at the level of classroom practice.

The lack of a proper promotional structure in primary schools was eventually acknowledged by the Department in 1997, with the introduction of two circulars titled

Implementation of Revised In School Management Structures (Circular 6/97 and Phase 2, Circular 49/97)

Building on the proposals from the White Paper (Charting Our Education Future, 1995) these circulars attempted to match the responsibilities outlined in the posts more closely to the central tasks of the school. They also encouraged the provision of opportunities for teachers, to assume roles of responsibility in the school for instructional leadership, curriculum development, the management of staff and the academic and pastoral work of the school. (Circular 1997, p.6) In addition to this, they altered the criterion on which candidates were to be appointed so that the most suitable people would fill posts. No longer were appointments to be made on seniority alone. Selection was now to be based on three equally weighted criteria –

a) Capability and willingness to undertake the duties as outlined in the post advertisement

b) Length of service in the school,

c) Interest in a particular area in the list of duties.

The facility for an applicant to appeal the decision of the Selection Board was also included. This led to the need for these Boards to keep proper interview records and adhere to the appointment procedures as outlined in the circular. These changes again built on recommendations made almost twenty years earlier in the INTO publication, A Proposal For Growth (1980,p.75)

They also offered additional clarification to the duties envisioned in the posts. This was reflected in specific post descriptions and new post titles: The Vice-Principal was now to become Deputy-Principal, Grade A post-holders would be referred to as Assistant Principals, while Grade B post-holders would be known as Special Duties post-holders. These new titles may have reflected a desire to share the managerial and

leadership duties more evenly, and in this regard it is interesting to note that the word PRINCIPAL now appeared in the three top grades of post. These developments mirrored to some extent the development of SMTs (Senior Management Teams), which were emerging in the English system, as described by Wallace and Huckman (1996,p.313)

New allowances were to be paid to post-holders willing to take on their revised duties and new job titles although post-holders did have the option of sticking with their old duties and allowances.

There was also a major change in calculating a school's entitlement to posts. Hitherto, these had been calculated with reference to the pupil's age, with higher points being awarded, as the child got older. Under the new system this entitlement was determined "by reference to the number of authorised teaching posts which have been sanctioned in the year in which the posts of responsibility accrue." (Circular 49/97,p.5)

The net result of this was a large increase in the number of posts to which a school was entitled which brought the overall number more in line with the allocation at secondary level.

New methods of determining the duties in the posts significantly catered for more staff input and whole school needs appraisal, subject to Board approval.

> The Principal, following consultation with staff, should agree the schedule of post of responsibility duties...The determination of duties should, in so far as is possible, be achieved by consensus between the Board of Management and the teaching staff... (Circular 49/97, p.2)

These changes meant that a greater number of teachers had the opportunity to become engaged in posts of responsibility, whose duties they had helped to create, and all of which now were to contain a curricular aspect.

While the new Departmental structures were to be implemented by 1998, the INTO

Report on the Role of the Primary Principal in the same year, worryingly noted that:

> The structures may not yet have achieved their potential, with the result that an undue burden of school management and administration fall on the Principal in these cases.

Two additional circulars issued by the Department entitled, *Appointments to Posts of*

Responsibility (Circular 17/00, further amended in 7/03) contained further

amendments to the revised in-school management structures. Principal among these

were changes to the criteria for appointments to posts. The new criteria read:

> 1) Willingness to participate in the school's middle management structures by undertaking the additional responsibilities specified in the list of duties.
> 2) Experience gained through length of service in the school.
> 3) Capability to perform the duties attaching to the post. (p.7)

(Under category 3 the Selection Board could also consider relevant experience gained

by a teacher whilst on leave of absence, career break or secondment.)

These changes meant the deletion of one criterion namely "interest in a particular area

in the list of duties". From the author's experience and in talking to colleagues, this

particular criterion had proved difficult for interview boards in objectively scoring

and separating candidates.

The criteria however, still do not acknowledge the considerable experience and

expertise gained by teachers who have spent a significant portion of their career in

another school.

While Circular 7/03 contains detailed clarification of the Appeals procedure (4 pages,

17-21) the fourteen duties suggested as suitable for inclusion in posts remain the same

as outlined thirty years earlier in Circular 16/73. (Section C).

There is scope for flexibility however, as these duties 'may be elaborated on at local

level' covering curricular, academic, administrative and pastoral matters. (p.2)

The schedule of duties for the post should be agreed following consultation between the Principal and staff and ' will address the central needs of the school'. These duties should also be 'inclusive in nature to facilitate applications from all of the teaching staff'. (Circ.7/03,p.2)

Unfortunately, the changes to the posts system as outlined in the circulars above have not been matched by provision of appropriate training for all of the participants, or even guidelines for best practice. The evaluation of these new structures by the education partners in the intervening period has been notably absent. A critical review of in-school management by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (2003) highlights that the difficulties of time, accountability, evaluation and review have not been addressed. (p.39).

> In-School management structures are working well in some schools, working somewhat in others, and in others, not working at all. (p.37)

The Education Act (Sections 22 & 23,1998) in outlining the functions of the Principal and teachers has done little to clarify the specific leadership roles and responsibilities of in-school management.

> The Principal shall-
> … (b) Provide leadership to the teachers and other staff and the students of the school,
> (c) Be responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and the teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of the teachers.

The support structures at local, regional and national level necessary for school leaders to build and sustain such an environment remain unmapped.

The Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary School Principal (1998) did help to clarify aspects of the new curricular leadership roles for school leaders.

In large schools the Principal may provide for the development of curricular leaders or co-ordinators in particular areas of the curriculum. A curriculum leader may have a special interest in a subject or have developed a level of expertise in a particular area. The role of the curriculum leader is not to take responsibility for teaching but to act as a co-ordinator and support for other teachers in a particular area. This involves collating materials and resources, having discussions and dialogue among the staff on the subject area, preparing materials for staff meetings, making presentations to other staff members and attending relevant courses and seminars. This might also involve making arrangements for consultation with all the partners in the process or liasing with other teachers and other schools, particularly in the case of small schools, where clusters of schools work together and pool their expertise.(p.36)

This vision for curriculum leaders was relevant and timely with the advent of the Revised Primary Curriculum in 1999 and the introduction of the School Development Planning Initiative to primary schools in 2000. Both have presented new challenges and opportunities to school potholders, in their capacities to review, plan, develop and implement at a curricular and organizational level, with regard for the whole school community.

Why is it then, that some schools have been better placed to engage with and benefit from both of these initiatives when for others the perception has been of unnecessary burden to what is already seen as a pressurised workload?

Given the educational developments of the last thirty years balanced against the constraints that exist within the system, to what extent have in-school management structures actually changed?

Despite the aspirations and thinking leading up to the introduction of Circulars 6/97, 49/97, 17/00 and 7/03, the extent to which they have actually been achieved vis-à-vis changes in practice, is still unclear. The need for and benefits of shared curricular leadership among post-holders, the extent to which it is already in existence and the conditions necessary to foster and sustain such leadership in an Irish context, remain to be clearly identified.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter I intend to review from the literature, what curriculum leadership actually is and why it is considered so important for the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. In seeking to understand this concept I will examine what it is that schools do, and what makes them distinctive as organizations in society. Following on from this I propose to examine the implications and benefits of curriculum leadership for teachers and post-holders. Finally, I wish to identify some of the constraints and challenges to curriculum leadership, which may exist inside and outside of schools.

What is curriculum leadership and why do we need it?

Sergiovanni (1994) looked at a new form of leadership appropriate to schools. This leadership was ideas-based and one that emphasised the moral connections between people. This leadership should

> Strive to transform the school into a centre of enquiry – a place where professional knowledge is created in use as teachers learn together, solve problems together and inquire together. (p.27)

This form of leadership should also

> Encourage principals, teachers, parents and students to be self-managing, to accept responsibility for what they do, and to feel a sense of obligation and commitment to do the right thing. (p.27)

viewed more as a series of technical and finite activities: establishing objectives, structuring scope and sequence, choosing relevant textbooks and resources, and selecting appropriate forms of evaluation. (p.1) Yet if the goal of curriculum leadership is the realisation of the whole school as a learning community then a

broader perspective on curriculum and curricular development needs to be explored. In recent years societal pressures have encouraged schools to be more transparent and accountable in what they do. In the desire to come up with models of best practice there has been an assumption that new leadership models for schools can be clearly defined and transferred to the under-performing school. Many of the models put forward and emanating from the business community are based on existing societal premises of what schools are, and what schools do.

Sergiovanni's work (1990), in seeking to identify what is that makes school different from other societal groupings, suggests that the imposition of such new models is not likely to succeed, primarily because the school is not similar to the formal organisations on which many of the leadership models are based. He points out that 'the organisation metaphor does not fit the nature of school purposes' (p.13) and challenges us to revisit our mindscapes regarding the functions and nature of schools.

> We should acknowledge that people are responsive to norms, values and beliefs that define the standard of living together as a group and that provide them with meaning and significance.(p.14)

He argues that schools should be "purposeful communities," in which firmly held core values permeate every aspect of the school organization and adds that if we really want to improve pupil learning outcomes this will occur 'only when classrooms become learning communities'. (p.138) For this to happen 'schools must become learning communities for teachers too'. (p.139) Prawat (1993) describes the goal of learning communities as building " social and intellectual connections among people" (p.9). Sergiovanni (1993) elaborates on this view and sees the work of schools revolving around teaching and learning. Schools should engage in

> Building a consensual and morally held understanding of obligations on behalf of common goals and the common good, combined with a commitment to individual freedom within this web of obligations (p.22)

Sergiovanni's covenantal view of teaching contrasts sharply with the contractual model so often cited in the business community and emphasises the underlying values that motivate and underpin the daily practices in schools.

Building school as community

What are the characteristics of such a community of learners, and what are the implications of such a proposal for principals, postholders and teachers?

Curriculum-focused leaders, be they teachers, post-holders or partners in the broader school community are united around the concept of the school's mission and share in creating a vision for the school. School mission has sometimes been viewed as the personal creation of the principal, who is expected to articulate it, publicize it, and promote it, but Rogus and Sergiovanni both emphasise the collaborative dimensions of the process. At a minimum, major stakeholders (teachers, parents, community, students) should be invited to participate in formulating the mission (Rogus, 1990). Achieving such strong consensus requires a delicate touch and as such school leaders may often have to let go of their personal visions to achieve a larger consensus. Sergiovanni indicates that the challenge for school leaders is to 'provide the conditions that allow the school to become a centre of enquiry.'(p.40)

Fullan (1992) acknowledges that you cannot have students as continuous learners and effective collaborators without teachers having these same characteristics. (p.47)

Barth (1990) links leadership to learning and points out that

> A school culture hospitable to widespread leadership will be a school culture hospitable to widespread learning. School cultures promote and celebrate continual learning for students only when teachers join the community of lifelong learners. In order to create communities of learners, teachers must model for students the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse - learning.

> A teacher who has stopped learning cannot create a classroom climate rich in learning for students. (P.81)

Hargreaves (1992,p.216) suggests the creation of a school climate that generates opportunities for teachers to learn from each other

> Teachers learn from many groups, both inside and outside their own schools. But they learn most perhaps, from other teachers, particularly from colleagues in their own workplace, their own school.

This 'learning on the job' offers teachers the chance to ground their theories alongside the work of their colleagues, in the local context, as curriculum is played out in daily practice.

Facilitating this teacher empowerment seems to challenge the assumptions of technical mastery and forceful decision-making associated with the school leader, as outlined by Weber (1989) who identified five main functions of leadership: defining school mission, promoting a positive learning climate, observing and giving feedback to teachers, managing curriculum and instruction, and assessing the instructional program. Weber went on to acknowledge however, that leading a group of professionals might call for a more collaborative approach. This implies that formulating a vision is more of a continuing dialogue than a one-time event.

Starratt (1995) suggests that new forms of leadership emerge when you have a shared vision of what leaders and their colleagues can accomplish. These forms are immersed in what the members do, consequently action is charged with meaning, value and a sense of the possible. This daily articulation of the shared vision builds into a covenant, bonding large collective beliefs into agreements and celebrations. (p.14-15)

Lashway (2003) points out that discussions on the creation of such a positive learning climate have often focused on 'principal-led' initiatives: minimizing outside

intrusions into classroom time, roaming the corridors to greet students personally, dispensing rewards for achievement. The move toward collaboration reveals a much more complex process where engaging teachers in the process of changing from traditional practices to new ones becomes the key.

Fullan, cites the work of Rosenholtz, which he says "points to the centrality of the principal in working with teachers to shape the school as a workplace in relation to shared goals, teacher collaboration, teacher certainty, teacher learning opportunities, teacher commitment and student learning". (p.161)

What are the features of schools that have genuinely become a community of learners? Barth describes such an environment as characterised by "…. experiential learning, abundant sharing of craft knowledge, reflection, observation, writing, conversation and embracing differences." (p.75)

Sergiovanni suggests that where such a community of learners is developed, student's academic, social and moral development is enhanced. (p.138)

He identifies specific characteristics of classroom communities in such schools and suggests that schools themselves should also be similarly transformed. (p.139)

These communities are *reflective* and *developmental*. Students develop insights into their own strengths and weaknesses. Students progress at different rates and at any given time are more ready to learn some things than others. Such communities are also *diverse* and recognise different talents and methodologies in teaching and learning. *Active discourse* and exchange of values and ideas among students, between students and teachers, and between teachers themselves is encouraged. In such communities individuals are *caring* and respectful of each other. They help each other to learn and grow as people. Finally these communities are *responsible* and see themselves as part of "a social web of meanings and responsibilities to which they

feel a moral obligation to embody their present behaviour as students and future behaviour as citizens"(p.139)

Developing school cultures to support curriculum leadership

The school culture itself is a key determinant as to whether models of curricular leadership can take hold and become embedded. The prevailing culture of the school as reflected in it's formal structures and hierarchies and it's daily practices and shared values, determines it's capacity to take on aspects of any change intended. Sergiovanni notes

> The heart and soul of school culture is what people believe, the assumptions they make about how schools work and what they consider to be true and real. (p.3)

He points out that the real challenge for school leaders is to acknowledge the current reality of school as experienced by the teacher. (p.4) Failure to acknowledge the underlying beliefs, values and attitudes that inform the teacher's daily practice may constrain any attempts to devolve responsibility and engage the individual teacher. If change is to be implemented and sustained at an institutional level, school leaders require a clear appreciation of what these underlying values, beliefs and attitudes are and where they come from.

Starratt (1995) also points out that the self-renewing school expresses it's vision in institutional structures that embed the vision into the everyday life of the school, in it's policies programs and procedures, that channel the everyday energies of people in a common effort. It also requires the continual renewal of the vision through everyday celebrations of the vision in ordinary and special activities, as well as through periodic restructuring of the vision. (p.14-15)

Fullan (1992) argues that releasing teachers from their traditional isolation in the classroom to work together can be regarded as a beneficial move for teacher collegiality but it is also an essential prerequisite to securing change in any enduring sense. (p.120) Fullan (1993) goes on to suggests that schools will need to be transformed from the present bureaucratic organisations to thriving 'communities of learners' and he sees principals' new work for the future as being to build such learning organisations. What is emerging here is a challenge to school principals and postholders to lead curriculum by bringing about a change in school culture, by overcoming individualism and isolation and developing management structures that support teacher engagement, collaboration and empowerment.

The Revised Primary Curriculum (1999) referring to curriculum development emphasises that this needs to be a shared responsibility

> The process of curriculum development requires the development of procedures and structures within the school that will facilitate a process of consistent curriculum and organisational planning. This should include the delegation of relevant responsibilities to deputy principals, assistant principals and special duties teachers. (p.19)

Rosenholtz (1989) found that collaborative cultures where teacher learning occurs, where decision-making is shared, and where teachers share respect and concern for one another, don't just happen but are created.

> Principals seem to structure them in the workplace by proffering ongoing invitations for substantive decision-making and faculty interaction. At some schools time is set aside for meetings among faculties where joint planning, problem solving and decision-making occur. At other schools principals build interaction opportunities into decision-making about in-service programs, or formally establish sub-groups of a faculty charged with particular technical decisions and responsibilities. (p.44)

This seems to suggest that norms of professional interaction among teachers need to be supported by formal and informal structures within the school and presents a

particular challenge to school leaders within the physical and time constraints within which they work. Rosenholtz (1989) cautions however that "it is highly improbable that principals can forge collaborative relations simply by inviting teachers to work together professionally" (p.61) Leithwood , Begley and Cousins (1992) found that principals who achieved some success in reculturing the school around teaching and learning had engaged in the following:

> They strengthened the culture, modified bureaucratic mechanisms, and engaged in staff development. In addition school leaders communicated frequently and directly with staff, shared power and used symbols to express cultural values (p.136)

New perspectives on curriculum

An additional challenge to schools, principals, postholders and teachers hoping to lead curriculum extends to their perspective on curriculum itself. Schools, as Sarason points out (1982,Ch.2) are not 'encapsulated' and have always had a transactional relationship with their communities, influencing and in turn being influenced by each other.

Reid's model of curriculum demonstrates the extent to which curriculum is more than a technical exercise around content and materials, and has an organizational form acted out in the school setting. He points out that curriculum is a balance between the theory, (how the task of the school is conceptualised by those within it) the social system, (the nature of relationships between teachers and students and between teachers themselves) and the technology (the available resources and facilities in the school).

However curriculum is not controlled and influenced by the school alone. Reid emphasises that the balance between these three elements is affected by inputs to and outputs from the school in the form of entering and leaving students and critically by

"social forces operating outside the school, either in the form of specific institutions, or the generally available stock of ideas, attitudes and values..." (1999.p.126)

In this regard curriculum also has an institutional significance that exists beyond the physical setting of the school and the teachers themselves are influenced by vested interests outside the school walls. The perceptions and expectations for schools and schooling that are held by the wider publics must be acknowledged by school leaders in any attempts to analyse curriculum, and in their work of leading curricular development. Curriculum as a reflection of wider societal values and ideas is therefore represented, not only by *what* is taught, but also by *how* and *why* it is taught. Teacher development for example is dependent not just on the microelements of curriculum as outlined earlier (objectives, content, methods and assessment) but should also acknowledge the social, economic and political context in which the teacher and the school reside. Goodson (1983) argues that school subjects are "socially and politically constructed and the actors involved deploy a range of ideological and material resources as they pursue their individual and collective missions." (p.231)

The introduction of the *Revised Primary School Curriculum* (1999) marked the culmination of many years of development and planning that involved all the partners in education. It states that " the curriculum is designed to cater for the needs of children in the modern world, and it's introduction is an exciting opportunity for change and renewal in primary schools."Its overall vision was "to enable children to meet, with self-confidence and assurance, the demands of life, both now and in the future". (p.6) What is emerging here is a vision of curriculum as grounded in the broad community, focusing on pupil learning needs and nurtured by an overall culture of learning in the school.

This appreciation of curriculum suggests particular levels of professional development among teachers and appropriate interpersonal skills for school leaders in building partnerships with the broader community around teaching and learning. Jones (1987 emphasises that the principals themselves also need to feel supported, from both within and without the school. In analysing the impact of societal change on schools, she identifies the help required for schools and school leaders.

> Heads and schools cannot ignore the environment in which their pupils, staff and parents live and work. Nor can they avoid change; what they need is help in managing change positively. (Ch.2, p.40)

School Leadership and Teacher Development

For norms of teacher empowerment, collegiality and collaboration to take hold and help create a learning community, what models of teacher development are appropriate, and what is the role of the principal as curriculum leader in affecting this? Butler (1993) identifies four key dimensions to teacher development. These are technical repertoire, reflective practice, collaboration and research.

> The important question is how to integrate and establish the strengths of each of these four traditions in the individual teacher as learner. (p.5)

The challenge for the school leader is to create a climate where these dimensions are more likely to occur so that teacher learning is supported in practical and meaningful ways. As we will see these dimensions are inter-linked and their development is dependent on the existence of supportive conditions within and outside the school. Coherent strategies for staff development must also take account of individual teacher needs that change over the teacher's life cycle. Tuohy (1999)looks at three areas of teacher development.

a. Extrapersonal - deepening the teacher's awareness of technical aspects of knowledge and subject matter, including pedagogical skills.

b. Interpersonal – increasing teacher capacity to build meaningful relationships-with pupils, other professionals and stakeholders.

c. Intrapersonal – teachers reflect on and develop a more meaningful sense of their own career and the work of the school. (p.175)

Traditional models of in-service and professional development may no longer be appropriate to address these developmental needs and nurture professional adult relationships in schools. Lieberman and Miller (1999) suggest that "new forms of teaching and leadership take hold when schools honour their adults as learners and provide opportunities for their professional development" (p.135) Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, (1999) pointed to the significant influence of the principal on school culture, but found also that the leadership of teachers had a significant, independent influence on the school, with consequent rewards in pupil learning outcomes.

They go on to promote a new model of professional development based on the idea of growth-in-practice. This is a collaborative model based on, becoming a professional community, combining inside and outside knowledge and creating an ethic of collaboration.

> …Where teachers draw on internal and external expertise to help them relate to their pupils, the curriculum and the pedagogy they use. They become involved in the creation of a community " where teachers relate to one another as colleagues, grow to trust one another, support one another in their attempts to reach the students, try to find new ways of working, and in the process commit themselves to their own continuous learning and development…(p.186)

In promoting such a community curriculum leadership itself is therefore a critical element in energising teacher development, which in turns helps sustain curriculum leadership as a culture in the school. Coolahan (1995) also argues that teachers themselves need to find a new form of professionalism, and adds

> An emphasis which would stress the narrow, technician approach to the teacher's work would seem to be wholly inappropriate. More than ever the

conclusion emerges that the teacher as full-scale professional, operating within a liberal tradition of role, is the only one to merit support.(p.47)

This suggests a more holistic approach to professional development within a framework of lifelong learning. These 'new social realities for teachers' as Lieberman and Miller experience it (1999) involve a move away from individualism and isolation towards becoming a participating member of a community. They acknowledge that bringing about this change is not easy. Being colleagues and learning to work together is an important innovation for teachers. As conflicts, disagreements and differences arise they must be acknowledged and dealt with, allowing the teachers to engage in common work.

Acquisition of these new interactive skills requires many opportunities to work with one's colleagues and deal with difficult issues along the way. If teachers get these opportunities to work, plan and be together, they can " achieve enhanced physical goals in their classroom, even as they are accomplishing collective ones for the school."

Jones (1987) adds to this challenge in assessing the professional development needs of school leaders themselves. Critically she points out that their capacity to make sense of daily interactions and others mirror 'interruptions' from within and without the school throughout the organisational culture of the school. (p.121) This suggests the need for an underlying sense of priority among school leaders around the shared goals and vision for the school.

Principals and teachers - New relationships

Curriculum leadership poses a particular challenge to the nature of existing relationships in schools. Sergiovanni, (1993,p17) whose concept of "community"

encompasses most of the dimensions of climate, identifies relationships as the linchpin. In a true school community, relationships are based on shared values rather than bureaucratic roles, resulting in "individuals who care, listen, understand, respect others and are honest, open and sensitive." He concedes that principals may need to begin by using bureaucratic authority but must ultimately build relationships based on professional and moral authority. " Callan, (1994) points out that the building of a 'collegial context' in school requires 'a leadership with skills in human resource development and an entrepreneurial attitude which exploits innovations or initiatives.' He adds that this is 'conferring a new/different role on many principals in seeking new kinds of working relationships with members of his/her staff.' (p.121)

Fullan (1992) referring to delegation and teacher empowerment, quotes Patterson who says that people feel empowered "when they can make or influence decisions affecting them, and have access to information and resources enabling them to make decisions" (p.91) He goes on to state that this delegation is "an orientation and skill that only a minority of middle managers have mastered". The challenge to principals and postholders as curriculum leaders, arising from these observations, is a capacity to share power and information willingly.

Jones (1987) argues for a new type of leadership among teachers and principals that stimulates and encourages growth, development and learning rather than providing ready-made knowledge and answers. The active involvement of staff and pupils in managing their own work is to be encouraged, with the aim of making them more capable and autonomous. Barth (1990) emphasises how the teacher–principal relationship has an amplifying effect on all other relationships. (p.21) This suggests consequences not just for relationships between teachers but also for the forms of relationship modelled in the classroom between teacher and pupil. If the principal is

encouraging and supporting teachers in their own learning they in turn are more likely to be encouraging each other and their pupils in a similar fashion.

Starratt refers to leaders with vision facilitating school renewal. (1995) In this context the role of the principal as leader and as a grower of leaders is crucial.

He suggests particular skills and competencies that may help including an ability to listen and acknowledge where the teacher is at, a capacity to communicate, inspire, motivate and build confidence, and finally humility and emotional intelligence in building supportive and enduring relationships that sustain a shared vision for the school. (p.15)

Barth outlines benefits arising from teacher leadership, not only to the school but also to the principal, the post-holder and the teacher themselves

> I would like to suggest.... 'All teachers can lead.' Sceptics might say 'a few teachers' or 'some' or even 'many.' But there is an important part of the life and work of the entire school at which every teacher is good, wants to become good, and can become good. Teachers harbour extraordinary leadership capabilities, and their leadership is a major untapped resource for improving our nation's schools. ... The world will come to accept that all teachers can lead, as many now accept that 'all children can learn' ... if we can overcome the many impediments facing teachers and principals that block teachers' leading, and if we can find conditions under which teachers will exercise that leadership.(p.441)

In the same chapter Barth (2001) makes some significant observations regarding the principal's role in leading forward a school culture that empowers teacher leaders.

> Clearly, there is nothing inherent in the role of principal that causes either curtailment or support of teacher leadership: it is how the principal chooses to perform the job [emphasis added]. By their day-to-day actions, principals build the culture of their schools. That pattern of behaviour can embed teacher leadership in the school's culture, cast a wet blanket on it—or have no influence at all. , (p. 443)

In these two paragraphs above, Barth identifies the problem of establishing permanent conditions supporting teacher leadership. Under current structures it is up to the principal to support or oppose teacher leadership. And, even if the current principal does support it, the next principal in the school might not. This suggests the need for a more devolved and shared managerial structure where the loss of one individual through promotion or retirement will not significantly alter a curriculum leadership culture. A cultural shift may also be required in teacher attitudes to embrace their new roles in school leadership as outlined by Barth (1990) who suggests that they may not yet have been realised.

> If the capacity of teachers and principals to enrich rather than diminish each other's lives and work is to be realised…. the school principal must assume more of the burden of protecting the best interests of teachers and liberating more of the constructive power of which teachers are capable. In addition each teacher will have to assume more ownership for the best interests of the school – including other teachers, other teachers' pupils, and the principal's.(p.28)

Curriculum leadership in schools-the challenges and the benefits

This form of shared leadership around teaching and learning does appear to require significant changes in existing cultures, new forms of relationships between teachers, and a new style of leadership from principals. Current models of professional development may need to be revised more around the teacher as a lifelong learner and willing participant in a learning community. The range of interpersonal skills, technical competencies, and understandings that teachers require to lead learning in the school present distinct challenges for school leaders, School Boards, Education Centres and Departmental programmes. Acknowledgement and recognition of teacher learning is a responsibility that may need to be shared by all of the above. The potential of current internal management structures to support curriculum leadership

among postholders, given the historical evolution of posts requires further investigation.

These are issues I will explore in the research and revisit in Chapter Five in light of any findings that may arise. Yet despite the apparent   constraints it is clear from the literature reviewed above, that curricular leadership among teachers and postholders is a goal worth pursuing, not just for the pupil, but also for the individual teacher themselves, for the principal, the staff and the whole school community. In Chapter Four I will investigate where Irish primary school leaders (particularly principals and postholders) stand, when judged against this new model of curriculum leadership and what are the critical factors supporting or hindering their capacities to engage as curriculum leaders with their school communities?'

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Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter I will outline the methodologies used in conducting this research the underlying rationale for using them. I will also explore the procedural issues involved in selecting the interviewees, including the targeted population, and the reasoning behind the methodologies employed. Finally I will describe how the data is to be analysed and identify the methods used to ensure that the research has both reliability and validity.

Context and rationale:

Chapter 1 looked at the evolution of middle-management structures in Irish primary schools in the context of increasing societal demands on schools, principals and teachers. Chapter 2 looked at the literature regarding a new type of shared leadership appropriate to the needs of schools, revolving around teaching and learning, and built on a culture of teacher empowerment, reflective practice and collaboration around agreed goals.

Particular issues have been identified in the literature. These include:

- The impact of school culture on the realisation of curriculum leadership among postholders. Relationships in the school and the leadership style of the principal, the level of professional collaboration, the presence of shared values and goals, and the curricular aspect of posts.

- Teacher development. The postholder's perspective on teaching and learning, and the opportunities for teachers to lead and learn in the school environment.

- The capacity of current internal management structures in realising curriculum leadership. The impact of the Departmental Circulars (1997-2003).

- The level of professional dialogue and engagement that exists with the broader school community. The impact of the Revised Primary Curriculum In-Service, and the School Development Planning initiative on the postholder with regard to curriculum leadership.

This research set out to explore these broad areas with a view to extracting meaning from the perspectives of postholders experiencing these realities in their daily workplace. To this extent the conceptual framework for the study took account of the individual biographies and values of the participants, and the reciprocal relationship these had with the structures, policies and traditions to be found in the school setting. In light of the developments outlined in Chapter 1, with particular reference to the introduction of the Departmental Circulars (6/97, 49/97, 17/00 and 7/03) and the increasing societal demands on schools, coupled with the introduction and ongoing implementation of the Revised Curriculum, I believe this research to be both timely and necessary. It also affords an opportunity to gauge the emergence in schools of new types of leadership that may prove more useful in leading curriculum development around pupil learning.

Purpose of the research:

In the research I wished to explore the extent to which postholders are equipped for and supported in practising curriculum leadership. In this regard I wished to identify from the key participants:

A) Their perceptions regarding curriculum and curriculum leadership

B) Their perceptions regarding what the existing constraints are and the supports

that they feel are necessary to help them engage fully in curriculum leadership.

I hoped, in Psathas' words (1973), to ask questions that would help me discover 'what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live.'

This is added to by Bogdan and Biklen (1982) who caution: 'you are not there to change views, but to learn what the subjects' views are and why they are that way'. (p.137).

Research Mode: A Qualitative Approach

Having already identified some key issues for research in the literature review, I was conscious of the time available to me and the possibilities of gaining multiple perspectives on these issues, from a number of postholders in their local settings. Statistics and cause-effect relationships were not the goals of the research. Nor did I envisage a linear or finite approach as being particularly useful in gaining these perspectives. I was more interested in pursuing Greene's understanding (1978) 'that for human beings multiple ways of interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others and that is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality.'

Central to my research therefore was a desire to ensure that dignity and respect for the participants was upheld at all times. Gaining access to the setting in a way that was comfortable to the participant and did not compromise their position and role in the school was critical. Participant observations from their setting would also be sought as described by Malinowski (1960) who insisted that any theory of culture had to be grounded in particular human experiences, based on observations and inductively

sought. I also favoured this form of qualitative research, as it's interactive nature allowed flexibility and a tolerance for adjustments as the research progressed. In this regard I hoped that the interview schedule would allow for open-ended responses, and be flexible enough to allow me as observer record and collect data on 'unexpected dimensions of the topic' as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p.71). The potential to discuss and probe particular issues raised was also critical to the selection of this research method albeit having some hesitation, based principally on lack of experience, with using this as a method of data gathering. To allay my fears in this regard I conducted two pilot interviews with postholders known to me who I felt would be reasonably conversant with the issues under discussion.

Purposeful Sampling:

The sample of population selected would be purposeful 'because of their characteristics relative to the phenomenon under study' (Wiersma, 1995,p.214) Consequently, the selection was guided by the following parameters.

For the context of this study I decided to focus on vertical (Junior Infants to Sixth) urban schools (> 12 teachers). This was determined by practicalities of proximity for interviews and a desire to ensure the school was large enough to warrant the full array of post-holders - principal, deputy principal, assistant principal and special duties post-holder. I was also conscious of the problems that might arise in the study, if I included schools with teaching principals. In particular, these schools have a differentiated internal management structure arising from the practicalities associated with the teaching principal's role, and including these schools might cloud any findings emanating from the research.

The individual postholders selected were as follows:

1.Two principals with a minimum of three years experience. I hoped to elucidate from the principals a review of the levels of curricular leadership among postholders in their school and to gain their perspective on the key factors that helped determine this.

2. Two deputy principals.

3. Two assistant principals.

4. Two special duties post holders.

These postholders (2, 3 and 4) represented the spectrum of internal management. They were all involved in positions of responsibility in their school, which engaged them in practical aspects of school leadership as they saw it, and the interviews afforded them an opportunity to give their perspective on curriculum leadership in the school, and the significant factors influencing it.

5. I also hoped to get some sense of overview of the issues surrounding curriculum leadership in schools from outside the school setting but with a close proximity to schools, through an interview with a 'cuiditheoir' (curriculum facilitator with the Revised Primary Curriculum). The cuiditheoir had previously worked as special duties postholder and I planned to attain a dual perspective from her. In this regard her interview was in two parts- the first dealing with her experience as a postholder in her school and the second dealing with her perspective as a postholder working in and with multiple schools. This was explained and agreed on beforehand.

The orientation in the principals' interviews, the postholders' interviews and the interview with the cuiditheoir might therefore vary slightly albeit that their perspectives would be sought on the central issues in the research outlined earlier. I was aware that as new issues emerged the working design would have to be tailored accordingly. In visiting most of the participants in their local settings I was also aware of being privy to some limited appreciation of context. Consequently, I recorded my

observations of the sites visited in field notes written up within a set timeframe after the visit. These field notes comprised of two parts:

a) Descriptive: these would try to capture a picture of the setting as observed.

b) Reflective: these would attempt to capture my frame of mind as observer and record the particular ideas, issues and concerns arising from the visit and the interview.

School selection:

School type was not a major factor in selection but I was conscious of capturing participant perspectives from a variety of school contexts if at all possible. I was also conscious of the need to stay objective at all times and was aware of Woods concern, (1985,p.53) when he noted the need for some degree of retraction from too much immersion in local issues.

As it transpired three interviewees came from primary schools with disadvantaged status, while five came from primary schools with non-disadvantaged status. A further classification of the eight interviewees reveals that four came from vertical single-sex schools, while four came from vertical co-educational schools.

Respondent selection:

While gender was not a particular issue for this research, in the event four males and four females were interviewed. The interviewees ranged in age from 38 to 56 and four of the eight had engaged or were engaging in post-graduate work with a leadership orientation. (Higher Diploma in Educational Management, Masters in Education-School Leadership).

I hoped that the multiple perspectives of the key participants would as Wiersma (1995) suggested, enhance the possibility of corroboration or 'convergence of the information on a common finding or concept' (p.264)

I also hoped that the background details on the postholders and their schools collected from the preliminary letter addressed to them (Appendices 1,2,and 3), along with the visits to the local setting, would give me 'a sense of each individual' and 'a sense of place' in terms of their location. In addition to this the written schedule of post duties requested when contacting the school principal, would further assist this process of corroboration.

The Interview Schedule

The style of interview used was semi-structured, which, as Denscombe (1998) points out means that 'the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which topics are considered, and perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and to speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher'. (p.113)

The schedule below was used as a checklist to ensure that the major aspects of the study were covered. It was not used in a rigidly structured or necessarily sequential form. However in all cases the first question was asked and used as an ice-breaker to ease the interviewee into the interview being mindful that it takes the respondent time to 'warm up' (Bogdan and Biklen, p.137) and to give the researcher a sense of the person he was talking to.

The broad areas to be referred to were as follows:

Question 1

This sought to gently open the interview in a non-threatening fashion by asking the postholder to reflect back on the factors that caused them to enter the teaching profession and to trace their career forward from there. Areas to be pursued included curricular areas of interest to the postholder, early influences and broader interests held by the postholder....

Question 2

This sought to gain the postholder's perspective on curriculum and their understanding of curricular change and development when reflecting over their teaching career. Areas to probe included their perceptions of what if any were the significant shifts or new emphases.

Question 3

This endeavoured to determine the postholder's perception of their post and the duties entailed in carrying out their post. Areas to pursue included their perspective on the level of curricular needs appraisal in the school and the formal/informal structures for postholders to meet.

Question 4

This sought to determine the level of collaboration on curriculum that was occurring in the school, and the nature of relationships that existed in the school between the postholder and other staff in the school. Areas to pursue included the extent to which the postholder was leading curriculum development in their school and the principal's leadership style.

Question 5

This sought to determine the postholder's satisfaction with the internal management structure as it related to their post. Areas to probe included their perception of the

changes in the governing circulars and how this transpired in reality, and to explore opportunities for professional development they had encountered in their school.

Question 6

This tried to identify constraints to curriculum leadership as perceived by the postholder in the school culture. Areas to probe included any constraints they identified.

Question 7

This sought to determine the level of professional engagement with the external environment in relation to curriculum. Areas to probe included possibilities for further engagement and what the perceived benefits, if any, might be.

Question 8

This sought to determine the impact of in-service (Revised Primary Curriculum) and school development planning (SDP) on the postholder with regard to curriculum leadership. Areas to probe included the impact of the cuiditheoir's role.

Question 9

This sought to examine the postholder's satisfaction with the role of curriculum leader and their perception of what supports might be beneficial to this role…areas to probe included any other concerns the postholder had and any additional constraints to their curriculum leadership role within or beyond the school…

Malim and Birch (1997,p.37) had also highlighted some of the difficulties with the interview method, principally: data falsification through faulty analysis and faulty memory, along with distorted observation or preconceptions of the interviewees. In this regard recording the interviews with the consent of the interviewees was essential

as well as following appropriate data analysis procedures relevant to the interview method as outlined later.

Engagement of the researcher

An awareness of my own interest in this area based on twenty years experience working in two different schools, constituted a bias in itself and consequently there was a danger of my intervening or manipulating the situation to fit in with my own beliefs around the areas being discussed. Hogan (1998,p.1) describes this aspiration for objectivity thus: 'the detection and disciplining of our own pre-judgements is perhaps the highest form of objectivity available to human enquiry'.

Therefore I tried to visualise my interviewer's role as primarily to listen and record. If clarification were required regarding an area being discussed I would willingly provide it if possible. If I felt it appropriate I would be empathetic to the interviewee's perspective, displaying some knowledge of past events encountered, and based on our common ground as primary teachers with considerable experience in and commitment to education.

During the interviews the interviewer tried to confine the dialogue to questioning and supporting the interviewee by way of maintaining good eye contact, nodding affirmatively and at all times listening to what the interviewee had to say. An attempt was made by the interviewer to suppress personal opinions and value judgements in order not to contaminate the data.

Yet in the reflective part of my field notes I did try to make some preliminary interpretations of the data and was aware that to some extent this process of interpretation had begun in the areas of probing that had occurred during the interview.

Piloting

Two postholders who were treated as appropriate for the purpose of the pilot piloted the interviews. In response to a request for clarification of the areas to be discussed, which arose when broaching the availability of the two postholders to assist me in pursuit of my research question, I offered and provided this to both accordingly prior to the interview. I also realised during this process that due to the differing perspectives of the respondents, because of their roles in the school and the nature of the issues being discussed, that the language used in interviews would need to be sensitive to each respondent's position in their school as it related to the other significant individuals in their local context. Consequently, some questions were re-phrased, included or excluded in terms of their relevance and appropriateness to the interviews as can be seen in the slightly different formats. (Postholders-Appendix 1, Principals-Appendix 2, Cuiditheoir-Appendix 3).

The pilot interviews also helped me overcome any technical fears I had that the recording would be intrusive or clumsy and thus restrict the interviewees in saying what they wanted to say. I did initially find it difficult not to over-direct the questioning and realised that some aspects of this probably emanated from my previous experience of more structured interviewing of applicants, for teaching positions and posts of responsibility in the school. As I eased into the process I found that the interviewees were quite willing to talk in relation to the broad areas outlined, and the format of questioning used was sufficiently clear to comprehend and follow. In this regard I found it beneficial to utilise a prompt sheet (Appendix 4). This contained reference to the broad issues arising from the literature review. At the piloting stage I found the prompt sheet useful to refer to as the interview unfolded and it helped keep me focused on the task. As the actual interviews proceeded

subsequently I found it less necessary to refer to the prompt sheet, other than as a summary point to ensure that the main themes arising from the literature review had been referred to, before each interview concluded.

Setting up the interviews

The interviewees were initially contacted by telephone where I explained the context of my research into curriculum leadership and requested their assistance if possible. I explained at this point that my prime interest in this area was in gaining the opinions and perspectives of themselves as genuine practitioners in education. I explained that the interview would take approximately an hour of their time, at a time and place of their choosing and emphasised my flexibility in working around whatever was most convenient for them. Having secured their willingness to participate and setting a provisional time, date and location I asked them would it be okay to contact their principal to inform them about the interview and explained that this was a matter of professional courtesy. In all cases the telephone call was followed by letter or e-mail, which they received within one week of the call outlining the research area, explaining the confidential nature of the information and outlining the broad areas to be covered if this had been requested when offered during the telephone call. This letter also confirmed the interview details as agreed, asked the interviewee to complete some background details in the context of the study, offered available contact numbers for any further queries and thanked the interviewer for agreeing to facilitate the interview. (Appendices 1,2, and 3)

Conduct of the interviews

All interviews were conducted at a place and time of the interviewee's choosing. In six cases this was a quiet area they selected in their local school while in one case the interviewee was more comfortable in their home setting. The final interview was held in the setting of my own school at the request of the cuiditheoir who would be working in the area on the particular day selected.

The interviews took place over a three-week period prior to the Easter holidays. The researcher tried to conduct each interview in a relaxed fashion and attempted by way of dress, tone and manner to engage the interviewer in meaningful conversation without compromising their own objectivity. The mechanics of the dictaphone were explained and an agreed hand signal was to be communicated to the interviewer if the interviewee wanted to halt the recording at any point, or to contribute something 'off the record'. In all cases the interviewee agreed to be recorded while in one case the interviewee asked for the recording to be paused while they contributed sensitive information to the interviewer. In this particular case an agreed form of words was found by the interviewee to commit the information to tape without compromising him or her, as they felt they otherwise might be. At the end of the interview the interviewee was asked if there was anything else they would like to contribute to the discussion, or if there was any issue they felt was relevant that had not arisen. Where the interviewee showed frustration with their local situation empathy was expressed by such phrases as 'I know' or 'I understand' without additional comment.

Finally, the interviewee was sincerely thanked for assisting the interviewer and was asked if they would like to be contacted when the research was completed regarding any findings that might arise that were appropriate for dissemination. The response to this offer was generally very positive.

Field notes

The initial observations arising from the visit to the site and contact with the interviewee were recorded in the afternoon of the day in question. These were a written account of what the researcher saw, heard, experienced and thought in the course of collecting the data. Further observations arising from the researcher's reflection on the visit and on ideas and issues emerging from the interview in particular, were recorded later. This latter part of the field notes was written up within forty-eight hours after each interview and during or subsequent to one replay of the interview recording.

This was in keeping with the advice offered by Bogdan and Biklen (p.119). And also Merriam (1981) who stated that

> The researcher must be sensitive to the context and all the variables within it including the physical setting, to people, the overt and covert agendas, the non-verbal behaviour. (p.22)

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed and coded as follows. Prior to interview the tapes had been numbered according to the interview sequence. (1-8)

The interviews were transcribed and stored in separate Word files with colour coding for the different postholder categories. The Transcript recording the interview with the first Principal was labelled TP1, Deputy Principal-TDP1, Assistant Principal-TAP1, Special Duties-TSP1 and so on. As researcher I found the processes of transcription from the tapes laborious but rewarding and was conscious of the words of Denscombe (1998): 'transcribing needs to be recognised as a substantial part of the method of interviewing and not to be treated as some trivial chore' (p.129-130) In line with the process recommended for this form of research as outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1982, pp.165-166) the data collected in the recordings (tapes) was analysed.

Analysis involves working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others.(P.145)

Unitising and categorising the data

Central to the research was the use of inductive data analysis procedures in an attempt

to ensure accuracy in the interpretation of the data given, so that it told it's own story

rather than following any pre-destined path laid out by the researcher or the literature.

Listening to the recordings and reading through the transcripts helped break the data

down into units for analysis. As an issue emerged it was listed as a unit of meaning.

These were recorded on Issue Sheets on which each interviewee was assigned a

separate column.

This again was following Bogdan and Biklen's advice to search through your data to

find regularities and patterns as well as for topics that your data covers. (p.156) As an

issue was recorded the transcript reference was noted on the issue sheet, in order to

create a clear and permanent audit trail as recommended by Maykut and Morehouse

(1994,p.146) All subsequent units of meaning that emerged were compared against

those listed on the Issue Sheets and subsequently categorised with similar units.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that by engaging in such a process the researcher

seeks "to develop a set of categories that provide a reasonable reconstruction of the

data he or she has collected" (p.347) Using this constant comparative method a

number of categories were identified from the recurring themes which were emerging

from the data. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) describe these as being 'provisional

categories' (p.135) For example; Issue Sheet 4-Curriculum Perspectives contain a

sub-heading- Pupil Learning Outcomes, with a number of entries listed, the first being

TC1, p1, and pg3. (Transcript –Cuiditheoir Interview-Paragraph One, Page 3).

The next step in the analysis was guided by Bogdan and Biklen , (1982, p.166) who said 'analysis is a process of data reduction'. This process involved subdividing the broad issues into sub-groups so that the process of identifying converging and emergent issues could begin. When all the data had been categorised and sub-grouped as described above, links across categories were sought. These links were then labelled by key phrases, which formed the headings for writing up the findings in Chapter Four.

Establishing Authenticity

In order to ensure the research had internal reliability the observations of multiple observers were analysed as outlined earlier and as advocated by Wiersma (1995, p.222) who also advises that ' a well organised persuasive presentation of procedures and results enhances external reliability.' (p.223) These suggestions informed the description of the research procedures earlier, and in outlining the findings in Chapter Four.

In order to establish conditions of trust with the interviewees I was conscious from the outset that all elements of my contact with them would be transparent and open to scrutiny. This researcher attempted to create research conditions that were favourable to getting authentic accounts. Confidentiality of the interview was assured to each participant. The interviewee's choice was accommodated in terms of interview location and timing. The researcher acknowledged their appreciation to the interviewee before, during and after the interview for facilitating them, and tried to establish and build a friendly and trusting relationship throughout the process. The researcher reminded them throughout that he was only interested in getting their perspective as key participants in evaluating curriculum leadership in schools.

In the selection of participants the researcher tried to ensure that each participant selected would give authentic and reliable accounts. Those selected had all shown a commitment to teaching and to their school. In most cases they had taken on a leadership role in their school. In order to confirm what was said in the interviews, clarifying questions were used such as, 'what do you mean by? When did this occur? How was this facilitated?' Where possible information given by interviewees was confirmed with reference to written documentation. For example, the interviewee's description of their post duties was checked against the written posts schedule. In seeking to ensure that this research had validity, the interviewees were told that the interview transcripts would be made available to them for corroboration if requested. This offer was taken up by three of the interviewees all of whom expressed satisfaction with the transcripts as authentic accounts of the interviews that had taken place.

Wiersma (1995) advises that the

> Validity of qualitative research for the most part is established on a logical basis, and providing an argument for validity requires well-documented research and a comprehensive description. (p.273)

Chapters 1 and 2 clarified the context for the research and identified the main areas of study. This chapter describes in detail the research procedures and methodologies employed. The interview transcripts and field notes taken also provide a clear audit trail back to the source data and enhance the trustworthiness of the research as outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994,p.115) who also advocate multiple methods of data collection. This was followed in the collection of written post schedules from the school principals and in the completion of written background profiles (Individual and School) by the interviewees. (Appendices 1,2 and 3) The data from these written sources was used to corroborate data obtained in the interviews so that through the

process of triangulation the validity of the research might be enhanced. Observations of the researcher on visiting the site were noted in the field notes and these were confirmed or disconfirmed later when reflecting on the visit and during the data analysis.

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Chapter Four

Postholders' Perspectives on the Key Factors that Support and Constrain Curriculum Leadership in Schools.

In this chapter I will present the findings of the research conducted among the postholders. In relation to the factors *as identified by them*, that support or constrain curriculum leadership in schools, the issues have been grouped under the broad headings arising from the literature review and pursued through the research process outlined in Chapter Three. These include:

- The school culture, and it's impact on the realisation of curriculum leadership among postholders.

- Postholders' perspectives on the impact of the Revised Primary Curriculum In-service, and the School Development Planning initiative on the postholder and on the school with regard to curriculum leadership.

- Postholder perspectives on teaching and learning, and on the opportunities and constraints that exist for teachers to lead and learn in the school environment.

- Postholders' perspectives on the capacity of current internal management structures to realise curriculum leadership in schools.

The findings from the individual and school profiles, along with the posts schedule collected, are largely quantitative and while limited in themselves, provide some insight into the types of school selected, the professional qualifications of the interviewees, the volume of posts in schools and the distribution of duties attached to these posts. The findings from interviews produced a wide range of qualitative data covering the five themes outlined above and also concerning other areas which had not initially been included by the researcher but which emerged as significant during

the course of the interviews. In Chapter Five I will discuss the findings in light of the literature review and identify areas for additional research and development.

Profiles of postholders and their schools.

The eight schools in which the postholders were situated contained a total of one hundred and seventy two teachers of whom twenty-eight were male (19.4%) and one hundred and forty –four were female. (81.6%).The total number of posts sanctioned by the Department in these schools numbered seventy-eight (45.3% of the total teaching staff). While gender was not a particular issue for this research, it was noted that eighteen of these posts were occupied by males (25%) while sixty were occupied by females(75%). On closer inspection it was revealed that the distribution of the senior posts (seven principals and seven deputy principals) was seven male (50%) and seven female (50%). Only two of the seventy-eight postholders had opted not to take on revised duties and allowances following the implementation of revised in-school management structures (Circular 6/97), and had retained their A-post and B-post status.

All eight schools had a typed schedule of duties for each postholder. Six of the eight schools had allocated curricular responsibilities to all postholders while the remaining two had allocated curriculum duties to some postholders. The listed duties in posts varied considerably from school to school in both length and content. For example two schools that had listed posts with P.E. as the curricular aspect, described the duties as follows.

School 2 - Duties

- Purchase equipment when needed
- List equipment

- Keep the store room tidy.

School 7- Duties

- Co-ordination and development with staff of a whole school programme for Physical Education.

- Provision of resources to support this (consult with principal) and maintenance of same.

- Regular briefings of staff (once per term) regarding areas of development , and feedback to staff re courses attended or initiatives at a particular class level in the school.

While the research did not permit me to fully investigate the extent to which these duties were being fulfilled, the schedules above demonstrates how the orientation of duties in some schools were primarily administrative while in others there was a greater emphasis on professional development. The word leadership did not appear in any of the listed schedules for the seven schools.

I did get a sense from the interviews however, that those schools which had included a curriculum leadership dimension to their posts were actively developing structures to support and maintain this. In terms of appointments to posts, of the eight posts held by the interviewees only the two for principalship were contested. Appointments to the remaining six posts were all given to the next most senior applicant and there was only one applicant for each post, even though the two Special Duties Posts had arisen subsequent to the implementation of the revised in-school structures referred to above. To this extent the practice of appointing on seniority had remained the accepted practice in these schools even after the Departmental revisions to post appointments.

Curriculum Leadership in Schools : Enabling Factors

Reflecting on their current schools and on previous schools where they had taught, the postholders identified a number of factors that they felt were significant in the realisation of curriculum leadership.

From Individualism to Collaboration

Elaine , an assistant principal, refers to an individual culture in her first school

> You know, unless I went to a teacher and looked for her help there wasn't a common ground of people coming together and talking or sharing practice, really. Now, the exception to that would have been the infant end.

When probed on this she emphasised that the collaboration among infant teachers had benefited consistency of approach and sharing of practice, but accepted that it happened mainly because of the free one-hour contact time they had at the end of the day. She elaborated further

> There was a culture of individualism really, and it wasn't malicious, it's just teachers felt more comfortable doing their own thing in their own class, and they felt 'I have enough to be dealing with, I can't take anymore on..' and there was a nervousness about exploring things collaboratively, a fear of being asked to do another job.

Angela, deputy principal explains

> The idea of a whole school approach didn't exist. You went in and closed your door. You were respected far more if you stayed in your classroom.

This tendency towards what Derek a principal interviewed, referred to as a 'magpie' culture, where resources were jealously guarded and ideas for good practice were not disseminated, had been seen to act as a significant constraint on some postholder's attempts to open up curriculum discussion and development. This individualism was often exacerbated by the internal politics in schools.

Noel, a special duties teacher described the effect on teaching and learning where individual relationships between some teachers had broken down, and in the absence of democratic structures.

> In my former school the internal politics of a divided staffroom meant that staff relations were very tense and consequently people were very uncomfortable about sharing ideas or giving feedback on what they were doing.. It was a hierarchical structure of power and information and consequently there wasn't a good sharing policy. For the postholder it was very difficult to break this down on their own.

Most of the postholders interviewed felt that their schools had moved on from cultures of individualism and top-down management, to increasing levels of collaboration and empowerment. Angela, deputy principal, noted

> In the old days there was a clear hierarchy and thankfully this is gone. We now have a flatter structure in the school where there is more debate and discussion. Regular staff meetings also help and the posts are more out in the open .The fact that every post has a curricular focus opens up the scope for all teachers to be involved.

Elaine, assistant principal, noted the influence colleagues had in developing her curricular expertise in English, by supporting pilot programs she offered to run in their class and this had consequently helped their own appreciation of pupil learning difficulties. This had also been facilitated by the school principal whose role emerged as pivotal with many interviewees in supporting or constraining curriculum leaders.

The principal's role

Bernadette, a special duties postholder, noted a huge change in realising her role under a new principal.

> All of a sudden somebody was interested in what I was doing . I didn't have to go to the office when I needed help because he was in the classroom a lot more. Suddenly getting appropriate resources wasn't a problem . He also freed me up to visit other schools and to try things out with teachers in other classes.

Elaine, assistant principal, described practical help she had received from the principal, who had actively supported her by locating funding for new resources, accompanying her to conferences and seminars and helping her to review new materials and make them accessible to the whole staff. Ethel, the cuiditheoir (curriculum facilitator) when ranking what she felt were key influences on on-going curriculum development, placed the principal's role first.

> First of all I'd say, acknowledgement and support of the principal, that's something I'd hugely see, and I notice myself when I interview teachers, when I've asked them about how have they been supported by the principal that YES is most definitely the dominant answer, and that when they need to be released from duties that the principal is behind them. I don't think I've had one situation where the postholder has said to me 'I've had difficulty in getting time to do that' or 'my principal isn't interested' that has never happened. The principals are totally behind the teachers.

However both principals interviewed did acknowledge difficulties in realising their curriculum leadership role. Margaret , the second principal interviewed, referred to the growing legal and administrative demands of the job, and the isolation of the principal's role despite the support of School Boards

> Where have we been given time to absorb them, to take them on board , to look at them or indeed even the support, we're just handed the legal implications, for example the principal is mentioned in the Disabilities Bill, how many, is it 45 times? 'the principal will' 'the principal should', and it also comes back to the areas of policies, we're not legal eagles.
> These are voluntary Boards, and realistically with the best will in the world it comes back to the principal. They say they'll support you, and they do support you, but you end up in the office here day in day out, making the decisions to keep things going, because if you don't it won't happen.

Derek described how being away from class teaching for so long made it difficult to be as au fait with methodologies as the teachers themselves. Opportunities to visit the classroom were diminishing as additional responsibilities were added to his role.

> I've been out of the classroom for eighteen years. When teachers ask me what they should do regarding their teaching I remind them that they are the experts. I'll support them in any way I can but I can't show them what to do.

When one reflects on these perspectives it seems unlikely that the principal's workload is going to ease sufficiently in the near future, and if this pattern of less contact with teachers and pupils continues to develop, it seems likely to erode further the principal's own capacity for curriculum leadership.

Increasing curriculum specialisation

One area that many postholders mentioned as helping them in their capacity to realise their curricular role, was the creation in recent years of specialist positions in the school. These positions encompassed learning support, resource for special needs children, language support for international children and resource for traveller children as well as the release in some schools of a teacher to co-ordinate ICT development. These were felt to have benefited postholders in two ways. Firstly they allowed the postholder to develop their own expertise in a particular area and to try out new methodologies with a small group of children. Secondly, a postholder was no longer tied to a mainstream class for the day , resulting in much greater freedom to get around the school, meet teachers and explore new areas of development with them. To this extent they could overcome the difficulty many postholders identified in trying to find an appropriate *time* to meet and work with other teachers. Elaine, assistant principal, mentioned the benefit of working in a learning support position as being hugely developmental in her own career and learning. She draws particular reference to an increase in her own esteem and confidence, which she felt was hugely significant later on in her role as curriculum leader.

> It gave me an opportunity to explore more deeply my area, my specific interest in language development and language disorders in children. It also freed me up to go into more detail and more depth into areas like assessment and evaluation. The learning support also offered me an opportunity to present at staff meetings. Because I was a learning support teacher I was a bit different

and I used to ask for a slot at maybe every second monthly meeting where I would present some findings to the staff or I would have gone to a conference and I would have had to present to the staff what I had learned there, and that helped me to develop my own self confidence.

Bernadette, special duties postholder, with responsibility for co-ordinating Visual Arts in the school notes

> I really have got into the Art. I do it with the resource children on a Friday morning, and they really open up. Unlike some other areas they find hard this is often more enjoyable and good for their own esteem. Some of them can be strong in an artistic way for children perceived as academically weak. It's also helped me in my post that with the number I have I can try out new ideas and give feedback on the results to the whole staff.

Most of the postholders mentioned that in seeking out additional challenges in these new positions their own learning and professional development had grown to the extent that their appreciation of teaching and learning was significantly enhanced.

Derek , principal, thought these opportunities were more likely to be disseminated to all staff when the school had a policy of healthy rotation at all class levels and of all specialist positions. This afforded all teachers the opportunity to develop professionally and consequently to be more able to take on the leadership aspect of their post.

The Revised Primary Curriculum In-Service

Feedback from postholders on the implementation of the Revised Primary Curriculum and it's impact on levels of curriculum leadership was quite positive although some postholders expressed concern that it's benefits would not be sustained.

While the initial in-service days outside school were useful the whole concept was as Bernadette, special duties postholder put it, 'alien to schools'. Gradually as the cuiditheoir service engaged with schools and schools themselves began to structure

their own planning days the general consensus seems to be that the whole support

service has improved considerably.

Margaret felt that schools could now plan ahead with confidence and build supportive

relationships with the curriculum support service.

> They kind of open it up more and I think in terms of the more successful days
> we've had, we've had outside support. But it's difficult and I think in terms of
> areas we're not used to looking it it's going to take a while,but I suppose we
> know now with the cuiditheoir service that it is staying with us, we're getting
> a bit more confidence, and we know we can plan ahead and again we're
> getting to know some of the same individuals and build up a rapport with them
> and that's there for the longer term.

In particular and given the focus of this study it was felt that the Cuiditheoir Service

had raised the esteem , status and profile of the postholders themselves and given

them a legitimacy to move on their curricular area in the school. Elaine, assistant

principal, had noted

> I think it has been extremely positive, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there
> can be a lot of vagueness around your curriculum aspect of your post, and now
> suddenly people who have posts of responsibility have all a legitimate reason
> for standing up with their staff now and saying 'Look, I really think we need
> to look at this, or I really think we need to look at that', because there had
> been a culture, I think it was Jennifer Little who talked about it before, of
> teachers being afraid to show their expertise among their peers.

James, deputy principal, reflecting back on a twenty-five year teaching career,

identified a more collaborative climate emerging in schools and attributed some of

this to the changes brought about by the New Curriculum and the Revised

Curriculum. He also pointed out that planning a whole school approach to any area of

school life had benefits for teaching and learning and explains it in this way.

> With the broadening of curriculum we have had a greater sharing of ideas , a
> greater sharing of talents, with an emphasis on planning, with an openness of
> people to move to new posts in the school, and with support people coming in
> and out of classes, that has helped people to become more open to change.

> Working together on our school behaviour policy back seven or eight years ago. We were all involved and that was a real catalyst for change.

Margaret referring to implementation of the revised curriculum felt that through whole staff discussion and collaboration a sense of common purpose was emerging. This was facilitated by everybody on the staff being divided into subject groups each of which was led by a postholder.

> We're going on this now, we know what we're about and we know what we're trying to achieve in the curricular areas. We have a direction and we have a working mechanism, so as we achieve some success in one area we try and apply what we've learned to another.

Jennifer, assistant principal, felt that teachers in her school were generally very supportive of the postholder and willing to get involved and this had been of great benefit in assisting curriculum planning.

Derek felt that the senior teachers in the school had an added responsibility to model learning especially for younger members of staff. This made it easier for new teachers to get involved and to question existing programmes and policies without fear of recrimination.

> Senior members of staff must project themselves as being learners as well and not as being experts. This is a danger with the way posts are constituted. Because somebody gives a good presentation at staff meetings they might be seen as the expert. It behoves this postholder to point out that she's not the expert and to take on board the expertise of younger members of staff.

The same principal felt that some senior postholders could feel threatened by new teachers which might hinder sharing of practice and advised them to make creative use of additional talents available to them

> I see older teachers in schools holding posts. They might not be as au fait with the revised curriculum as some of the new teachers and they can sometimes be fazed by a new teacher with an expertise in a certain area.
> The help that person needs would be to ensure that they take on board that new member of staff, and use that new member as a resource to make Art happen in the school.

Derek identified a more facilitative and co-ordinating role for the postholder, which he felt in the long run might bear more fruit than trying to lead their curricular area on their own. Some of the postholders also felt that the involvement of other teachers would break down barriers that they felt existed between postholders and non-postholders. Elaine , assistant principal put it this way.

> Rather than having this big divide between you're either a postholder or you're not, I think there has to be a middle ground, there has to be a growing towards a post, and maybe when people are being interviewed for posts you will be taking into account, well what interests have they shown, and what sort of committees they have worked on.

Ethel, the cuiditheoir saw particular benefit in the concept of subject teams in the school led by the postholder but including all the teachers in subject groups.

> I think there's huge possibilities there, in particular for new teachers, because I think it gives them a flavour of what it's like to have a leadership role, in effect if one of those friendly teachers put up their hand and said 'I'll be the contact for English at Junior Infant level or whatever' that it gives them a responsibility, okay albeit it's not a payable responsibility, but it's an acknowledgement and a learning opportunity for them and it gives them an opportunity to work at a different level with colleagues and it encourages them in self-reflective practice as well, and it gives them I suppose a sense of what it would be like for them to have a leadership role, maybe a post of responsibility later on, it's part of their c.v., part of their professional development.

Two of the eight schools had moved in this direction. Both had experienced benefits in doing so and felt it was assisting in realising the school as a learning community. This concept of subject teams was already in operation in one school visited and Margaret's reaction since it's introduction was very positive

> Also what has helped to move it along is that everybody is involved in some area, we've divided everybody to cover all the curricular areas, so there's about four people in each group. At the minute there's English, Irish, Maths, Visual Arts and SPHE so everybody's in one of them and each group has to move their particular area along so I think that has benefited it's a real structure on the ground and it's definitely helping.

The School Development Planning Initiative

School Development Planning brought a mixed response from   postholders when asked if it was   assisting the school in becoming a learning community. This seemed to be related to issues of timing and clarity, as it's introduction coincided with the in-servicing of the revised curriculum. Elaine, assistant principal, felt that schools had enough on their plate and needed more time to benefit from this initiative. Margaret, principal, felt that it added to teacher confusion and overload.

> I think the school development is still very hazy in people's minds. While some things we have achieved I feel it's an area we haven't yet got to grips with. You know trying to handle the two together has cause to muddle people.

Interestingly James , deputy principal the one postholder who did feel SDP had been particularly beneficial, was working in a disadvantaged school and they had been part of the initiative two years longer than the others, and seemed to have a handle on what was involved.

> One of the greatest benefits has been the emphasis on whole school, subject and classroom planning. Teachers are encouraged to look at the overview and look at their classroom teaching as part of that plan.

When reflecting on these new initiatives in schools and the other factors outlined earlier, one senses a changing context emerging for postholders to work within, which is becoming more open and collaborative. While this climate is affording new opportunities for postholders it also suggests new responsibilities and presents new challenges.

Constraints and Challenges in Realising Curriculum leadership.

While the immediate school culture impacted on levels of curriculum leadership among postholders they also identified other factors that presented a considerable challenge to their capacity to lead curriculum development .

Societal influence

All of the postholders interviewed, acknowledged the changed terrain in terms of the diminishing capacity of schools to shield themselves from societal influences. While the ongoing integration of children with special needs and coping with the breakdown of the family unit were just two of a number of factors mentioned, these pressures seemed to have elicited both pro-active and re-active responses from schools in terms of developing curricular programmes appropriate to these pupil needs .

Margaret, principal, felt that all of society's problems were now impacting directly on schools and in her opinion teaching and learning were suffering because of it .

> The biggest shift is the way society, the way family life has come into the classroom. It's something you hear teachers saying and it's certainly something I've felt in the last four or five years when I was teaching and even since taking up this post, if all the family problems are coming into the school, and until you can handle them in some way, which I'm not necessarily saying is a good or a bad thing, you can't get on with the teaching.

Her comments identify the difficulties some teachers and postholders experienced in embracing new roles in the school, and coping with increased societal demands on schools to deal with a broader range of issues impacting on pupil learning.

Meeting Diverse Student Needs

Noel, special duties postholder, felt that the shift by teachers from a whole class approach to a focus on the individual, arising from a perceived societal need, was leading to a new perspective on curriculum, as a process to support pupil learning.

> There's a huge change with how we deal with individual pupils particularly from disadvantaged areas. When I started teaching we expected all children to follow the same rules to abide by the same guidelines. Now nineteen years on when I start with a new class the first thing I do is get a list of pupils, look at the background situation and see how we can work with that pupil. I'd insist on meeting parents of particular pupils in need, far more often, whereas before I'd have met them just at the annual parent teacher meeting. There's also far more emphasis on working with individuals in class groups and we have moved away from solely academic to focusing on the pastoral needs of the pupil. When you're looking at the pupils you're really talking about the way you've changed your teaching too.

Societal appreciation of multiple intelligence had led to the inclusion of new subject areas and a focus on less didactic methodologies. This he felt, had made education more inclusive and was very beneficial to the academically weaker pupil but had resulted in a less challenging curriculum for the more able ones and put an added burden on curriculum leaders in planning a more varied programme to support individual learning needs.

> Firstly there are more subjects now and there's a much wider base. The curriculum has broadened so practically anything a person feels is creative can be included somewhere on the curriculum. Having said it's less challenging for the more able pupils so I guess the challenge is to make it more challenging for them.

The time required to facilitate planning of such individual learning programmes and to co-ordinate class programmes both horizontally and vertically in the school, given the constraints of teachers tied to individual classes for the day, was a recurring theme in the interviews. While postholders did not have direct responsibility for this many

felt that the absence of structured planning time in schools impacted significantly on their capacity to develop their curricular area.

Professional development for postholders

Most of the postholders interviewed mentioned that the professional development opportunities they had encountered in their teaching career had a significant influence on their present capacity to lead curriculum development. Developing competence in a curricular area had also added to their confidence and capacity to lead colleagues. Margaret, principal traced this back to a practical grounding in that subject she had received in teacher training college.

> We had six hours a week of hands-on Art and Craft for first year. Big input . We all loved it. Absolutely every media under the sun we had experience of and we worked on themes and everything else which was great training for the classroom. I found that super especially if you didn't draw, and we actually learned how to draw. for those of us who never knew we actually learned the techniques and all of that.

Derek, principal , suggested it was beneficial for the postholder to have a love of and interest in the subject area in their post, that extended beyond the school. This interest he felt, transferred to pupils and teachers alike.

> Outside interests are very beneficial. These tend to be overarching inside and outside of school . You don't switch on and off for the day. Teaching isn't that kind of a job. You've got to have a love of something to teach it well, and if you're interested in it yourself it comes through to the pupil.

In the course of interviewing the postholders this researcher felt the absence of an over-arching structure to support teacher learning which was often pursued at the expense of the individual. Bernadette, special duties postholder, felt that teacher learning needed to be celebrated and acknowledged more by the school for the same reasons that pupil learning is acknowledged and celebrated.

Until this happened she felt that the teachers themselves would not be encouraged to lead learning in the school. Derek, principal, suggested that schools themselves should set up mentoring programmes for new postholders and pointed out the benefits that might arise from local subject clusters incorporating better utilisation of the Education Centre which now had a Drop-In facility for subject leaders.

> In terms of curriculum, there is a huge amount of help available.
> I do think there could be a far greater sharing of expertise and it would be wonderful to have a local cluster of schools so that our Maths or Irish postholders could meet and share good practice.

However concepts of postholder mentoring, in-school subject teams and local clusters for curriculum postholders with similar curriculum areas, remained aspirational in most of the schools I visited . Some postholders also found the location of the Education Centre, which was a considerable distance away, and the timing of support sessions, which happened in the evening, an additional burden on the postholder . In some cases this meant that they attended less than they would have liked and for others it meant that they didn't go at all.

Margaret, principal suggested that the Department of Education had not fulfilled their formal training responsibilities for postholders as promised with the introduction of the revised management structures in 1997. This she felt had been detrimental to curriculum leadership as practised by postholders.

> I don't think postholders have got enough inservice in their curricular role, and thinking about it now and since this morning, they're given a job but sure who gave principals inservice either, there's a total lack of training and support throughout the system. I mean we're told we're supposed to be curriculum leaders, we're managers, we're heating consultants, we're engineers, and the rest.

Margaret also felt that different skills were required for teachers to lead learning outside of the class and across the school.

They may have a great interest in a subject area , they may be wonderful at teaching it in their own classroom but it's a horse of a different colour to lead your own subject area among your peers.

Other realities emerged in the research which also acted as constraints on the postholder and many of these can be associated with the realities of internal management as experienced by the postholder.

In-School Management

The cultural baggage attached to posts of responsibility in some schools emerged as a significant impediment to curriculum leadership. Noel, special duties postholder, felt that as all posts in their school went with seniority this had led to a culture of seniority being applied by management to support and resource positions also. Consequently the suitability of individuals appointed to these positions was questioned by staff. The postholder felt this had a detrimental effect on pupil learning and teacher motivation.

Adding to the issue of seniority as a constraint some postholders pointed out that even though it was one of three criteria to be used now in appointments it was hard to break from the old system. One anomaly identified in this area was the failure of the present system to acknowledge the experience gained by teachers in other schools.

As Margaret pointed out

> The other thing about seniority, it's seniority in a school. You could have a person who is twenty years teaching, but is only two years in the school. There's no mechanism there to acknowledge that. That's not right either. You could have somebody who's coming in new to your school from the panel or whatever, who has great experience in a curricular area and they haven't a hope in hell of getting a post. That's not right either, experience is experience wherever you get it. You're in the school, you're working for the Department of Education and that experience should be transferable. Looking down through my own staff , there are people who have been in three or four different schools, and to be quite honest, is their experience in some areas not far broader and more valuable from working in the one school?.

Yet in speaking to postholders three of the schools had an accepted practice that posts would continue to be filled according to seniority. This was felt to cause less friction among staff and generally less hassle for the principal. It seems that while this practice remains the posts structure will be under-utilised as a vehicle for promoting curriculum leadership among postholders as the anomaly highlighted above can exclude some staff members who may be more suitable and capable of taking on the curricular duties in the post.

James also referred to inequities in distribution of curricular duties under the system of allocating each postholder a curricular area

> There's a degree of unfairness that even though you assign one to each person, maybe one person has a heavier area, so you might have to split areas in the future.

This inequity between posts was echoed by Noel who felt that the amount of work for the postholder to do in leading a subject area, varied greatly depending on where the subject was at. Established subjects such as English and Maths were likely to have structured programmes in place already whereas new areas like SESE and ICT were likely to require a lot more effort to get up and running.

On the extent to which opportunities for postholders to meet was facilitated, six of the eight schools did not have regular meetings of postholders, if any at all, while one had termly meetings, and the remaining school had monthly meetings .All postholders interviewed felt that regular postholder meetings would be beneficial in realising their leadership role

Noel, special duties teacher, speaking about the posts in his school notes

> When new posts are created we look at what's needed but there's no annual review. Also since I was appointed everybody knows I look after computers but there are at least three postholders and I couldn't honestly say what their

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duties are. If we had postholders meetings and the roles and responsibilities of postholders were highlighted at staff meetings, and if the postholders had an opportunity to say a few words about what was happening in their area it would make a huge difference to the school.

James, deputy principal adds

Well we would meet formally but meetings wouldn't be regular enough . The middle management structure wouldn't meet on a regular basis. There'd be a problem too with ambiguity in that people very often don't know whose post a certain area is. At staff meetings too not every postholder would give a report back.

This lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities in the school was felt as restrictive

of curriculum development by a number of the postholders interviewed.

Postholders in schools where there was no regular review of duties also noted the

phenomenon of 'add-ons'(duties attached later) and the mismatch that could emerge

over time between your written duties and what you actually ended up doing, leading

to frustration and a diminished leadership role. This is captured in Noel's description

of his post

My post is to do with computers, ICT. The previous person to have that in their post left about three years ago and the post wasn't filled. The post is described as looking after resources and materials, keeping staff updated on new developments in ICT, putting together an ICT policy for the school and organising repairs. To be honest on the ground the reality has been repairing machinery. Going round to teachers who are frustrated with printers that don't work or a computer that breaks down. I'm also involved in spending school grants and am currently re-activating our school website which has been idle for a number of years. It's been a bottomless pit and certainly time for promoting ideas or sharing ideas has been very limited.

Noel also raises the issue here of loss of expertise, where a postholder leaves the

school due to secondment, promotion or retirement and there isn't a sufficient

dispersal of learning and expertise to maintain the development of that curricular area.

The lack of clarity around the postholder's role, and the lack of definition around

curriculum duties in posts was also mentioned by some postholders. Margaret, principal, suggested that the Department should give the lead:

> It should be a clear job profile, they should say this is why we're paying you, be it pittance or whatever, this is what you're taking on with the territory. Okay a school could prescribe it's own post and the different things you want a person to do, but I mean the Dept. laid out three headings :curricular , pastoral and administrative . Within that they could have clearer definitions, they could define what a curricular leader would do. Even the principals have had to define their own role because the Department hasn't done it.

Margaret put some of the problems down to the inherited nature of the posts system in schools and the fact that duties could not be changed without the postholder's consent.

> Well, I inherited a lot of posts pre-defined, that really and truly I suppose in modern day terms weren't very satisfactorily defined. I'm finding that very frustrating. I would certainly be very happy to hand out responsibilities in areas, but at the same time people, when it's put to them are reluctant to take it on, reluctant to the point of saying, oh no, I won't do that. There's a lot of mindshifts to go on there. I inherited a lot of baggage with the posts and while we have made an effort at defining them, I suppose one or two of the senior posts are difficult, and it's not setting good example to the ones lower down, who resent the fact, and it's not changing. Between the postholders in terms of doing their duties there needs to be some sense of equity.

The resistance of some postholders to a change of duties in the interests of curriculum development was described as bordering on possessiveness by Elaine, who felt it was the pupils learning that suffered most .

> Every time the principal tried to bring up the subject at our monthly meetings it was strongly, strongly resisted, and people did not want to change. I just felt we could have thrown all the cards on the table, look these are all the duties, let's rearrange them , and I couldn't understand the mentality of people who were being possessive about aspects of their posts

This resistance was also aided by a powerlessness to enforce postholders to carry out their duties as described by Margaret.

> As some body said , we can do all the hiring but none of the firing.I think a lot of the difficulty is that the Department , and our I.N.T.O.won't back principals up. If you go back to it, there's been far too much woolly thinking around all of these posts, if people are being paid an extra amount of money, there should be no argument about the fact that this necessitates three hours per week,

outside of school time. People may say they will carry out their curriculum duties but the reality of it is that you've no teeth to enforce it.

Another dichotomy in the postholder's role was raised by Bernadette who pointed out that postholders were now engaging in formal subject planning and had less time to assist curriculum development at class level.

There was general acceptance among most postholders however that the implementation of the revised structures from 1997 on had facilitated increased levels of curriculum leadership among postholders. The fact that most posts now had a curricular element was seen as a positive development and yet some felt we still had a long way to go. The failure of the Department to provide appropriate training for postholders and members of the Boards of Management in planning curriculum development in the school was mentioned by all postholders.

Margaret felt that the Inspectorate could do a lot more to support curriculum development and felt they were less involved than before.

> They seem to be a lot more busy now with their caseload and that's not positive for the teachers, because they don't see them often enough to have any kind of relationship with them. It seems to be diplomas and tuairiscí scoiles and the ordinary practising teacher does not seem to be supported at that level even though it's in the inspector's brief.

Noel, special duties postholder added

> I think the Inspectorate could play a far more supportive and advisory role. We did have an excellent Inspector here some years ago who was quite willing to come in and show new methodologies in the classroom and share ideas in the staffroom. In recent years however it seems to be diplomas and mór-thuairiscí that we see and any input in the latter tends to be critical of schools without offering ways to improve.

Summary of Findings

Arising from this research a number of factors have been identified by postholders as significant in supporting or constraining their curriculum leadership role.

While many schools now have a curricular dimension to their posts, inequities between posts and a lack of clarity in the duties assigned to postholders, remain.

Even though the appointments system was revised in 1997 the practice of appointing new postholders solely on their seniority in that particular school, persists and may impede the capacity of schools to appoint the most able and suitable individuals to posts. Cultures of individualism among teachers and isolationism among schools while diminishing have not disappeared and challenges to internal collaboration and sharing good practice between schools remain.

The absence of regular reviews of postholders' duties and the failure to facilitate postholders' meeting on a regular basis continues to restrict their leadership potential. The existence of structures supportive of postholders in terms of mentoring and the provision of adequate time to fulfil their curricular duties do not appear to be widespread practices. The provision of appropriate training and recognition for postholders by the Department, and ongoing support through the Inspectorate, has not yet happened. Lack of supports for the principal to discourage underperformance by postholders in realising their curriculum role, remain a reality.

While principals appear supportive of postholders in terms of resource provision, administrative and legislative demands make it increasingly difficult for them to play an active role in curriculum leadership and to develop a facilitative and enabling role.

The emergence of new concepts such as postholder mentoring, subject teams and postholder clusters in local schools appear to offer potential for increased

collaboration, empowered decision making and sharing of good practice but constraints to their development remain.

The voluntary nature of School Boards and the lack of specific training for Board members, to support the curricular work of schools in practical and meaningful ways, continues to curtail the development of teaching and learning.

Ongoing professional development appears to rely on individual teachers and their principals. The specialist support teaching positions in schools appear to be assisting teacher and pupil learning but their retention remains uncertain. The use of curriculum facilitators and The Education Centres to support postholders and schools is improving but difficulties still exist while the School Development Planning initiative is only beginning to attend to the needs of the individual teacher at classroom level.

In the final chapter I will comment on these findings in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and developments in the Irish context outlined in Chapter One.

Chapter Five

Emerging Issues for Postholders in Assuming

Curriculum Leadership

The previous Chapter provided some insight into the postholders' perspectives on curriculum leadership and the factors they found to be most significant in realising this role. In this context a number of issues emerged in light of the interviews as meriting further discussion and exploration. In considering these issues this chapter will link the findings of the study to the research literature in Chapter Two and place them within the Irish context as outlined in Chapter One. Although these issues were categorised in the last chapter under broad headings, curriculum leadership cannot be broken into such neatly defined areas, and is comprised of a complex layer of interactions taking place within a supportive climate against a multiplicity of pressures that form the daily reality for the postholder.

It requires particular skills and understandings from principals and postholders and a commitment to pursuing shared values and goals. It also demands appropriate supports from schools and presents significant challenges to the education system at local and national level.

In this chapter a number of questions will be raised and some observations and recommendations will be made, including the identification of particular areas pertaining to curriculum leadership among postholders, which lie outside the framework and scope of this study. An attempt will also be made, given the limitations of the research, to determine the extent to which curriculum leadership is understood and practised by postholders in Irish primary schools.

A key aspect of curriculum leadership is the development of the school as a learning community. As we have seen this presents additional challenges to postholders in

planning a varied curriculum suited to individual learning needs. It calls for particular competencies among curriculum leaders in relating to and collaborating with their peers, and a shared commitment to promoting the values of the school as understood by all the participants therein. It also presents significant challenges to schools with particular reference to the roles and responsibilities of principals and Boards of Management. Opportunities for the postholder themselves to learn and develop professionally, lead to increased 'curricular confidence' and a greater capacity to lead learning in the school. Leithwood (1999) and others pointed out earlier that teacher learning also leads to better pupil learning outcomes and helps the school achieve it's collective goals. However, this needs to be supported in meaningful, structured and practical ways by the principal, the School Board, local supports and national structures for teacher development. As Coolahan (O.E.C.D., 2003) points out in this year's interim report on teacher development these supports must encompass the three I's (Initiation, Induction and Insevice) which can assist continual professional development as teachers progress through their careers.

For the principal it means a sharing of the curricular responsibilities and an opportunity to cultivate the human resources of the school around teaching and learning. Rosenholtz (1999) argued that school leaders who involve teachers in shared vision building, which is focused on teaching and learning, increase teacher motivation to become part of the learning process.

> Principals who involve teachers in generating information about the goals of teaching, in scanning and choosing the best alternatives, grant teachers a part in constructing school reality (p.15)

However the research suggests that principals too need specific training and supports to help them move from their administrative role and entrust and share power with their postholders.

Jenkins (1990) suggested that ownership achieved through collaboration and negotiation can form the uniqueness of the school and it "can gain commitment from the stakeholders to a future state of excellence. (p.43) As we saw in Chapter Four this collaborative process needs to be supported in practical ways such as time for postholders to meet and regular review of their curricular duties in light of the school's learning needs. The principal and Cuiditheoir as we saw, can empower postholders and raise their status and profile in the school.

Eisner (1988) pointed out that schools and teachers themselves, by their very nature might resist attempts to change.

> Changes in schools that require new content and repertoire are likely to be met with personal resistance by experienced teachers who have defined for themselves an array of routines they can efficiently employ. (p.78)

Postholders require different skills to lead learning. These as we have seen include initiative and good interpersonal skills to overcome resistance and establish professional relationships and shared goals with their peers. Sergiovanni suggests

> Systems change involves changing our basic theories of schooling in ways that allow for a new sense of what is effective and what are good practice, and a new distribution of authority. (p.140)

Callan, (1994,p.27-28) commenting on the introduction of the Junior Certificate and it's intentions for active learning, drew attention to the 'human factor in change'. New reforms require more than technical adjustments to existing systems. Creating a cultural shift in teacher's values is at the centre of meaningful change. In Schools for Active Learning, (1994) Callan also highlighted the difficulties in sustaining curriculum leadership on an on-going basis in our schools

> The challenge confronting those seeking change in our schools is to effect a change from practices, which have a proven public record, to practices whose public credibility has yet to be established. (p.124)

To this extent the changes sought in bringing about our schools as learning communities must have credibility beyond the school if their impact is to be sustained.

This researcher does acknowledge that a broader investigation of curriculum leadership in schools might have included the perspectives of pupils in the classrooms as well as the perspectives of non-postholders, parents and members of the School Inspectorate. However, given the time and physical constraints on the researcher, this research focused only on the perspectives of internal management as constituted by the principal and the postholders. It is also important to acknowledge the constraints on a postholder's capacity for curriculum leadership that are particular to their local context, including those working in disadvantaged schools and schools with teaching principals where other pressures and demands may apply. These avenues may entice further research in this area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary then, what are the benefits to schools willing to espouse curriculum leadership as a way forward, and what are the challenges confronting Irish primary postholders in attempting to engage in this type of leadership? It appears from the research that there are both supportive and constraining factors present in our schools. While there are positive signs that postholders are engaging in curriculum leadership and receiving some support from colleagues and principals, we can see from Chapter Four that there are also particular constraints impeding the realisation of schools as communities of learners. If we look at these in light of the findings from the literature in Chapter Two it is possible to make recommendations that may sustain and grow

curriculum leadership as a culture worth pursuing in our primary schools for the future.

It appears that when curriculum leadership is embraced and sustained there are particular benefits to the school. Firstly, attention to pupil learning outcomes provides a central focus for the work of the school. The involvement and empowerment of postholders and teachers in leading this process creates higher levels of commitment to the school's goals and to solving curricular problems for themselves. This in turn lightens the principal's load affording the opportunity for a more reflective, facilitating and supportive role. This climate of reflective practice, research and professional collaboration can lead in time to the forging of enduring professional relationships which are necessary to underpin and sustain a self-renewing school culture. The involvement of the broader school community helps communicate the purpose and work of the school to a wider audience where legitimacy for it's activities actually resides. Developing subject teams in schools, sourcing outside expertise and developing links with other schools and education centres helps build the postholder's capacity and that of the overall system. In recent years the emergence of newer forms of in-service offer possibilities for ongoing support of schools at local level. The Cuiditheoir service (Revised Primary Curriculum) available to schools since 1998 and the provision of planning facilitators (School Development Planning) shortly afterwards in the primary school system have the potential to build on the shared knowledge, skills and experience found in the school context. Teacher-leaders and teacher-mentors working within a model of reflective practice and collaboration can themselves facilitate curricular development and in the longer term lead their schools and themselves to a greater understanding of the issues surrounding teaching and learning.

The transition to this new type of leadership is not easy however and there are significant challenges to overcome before it can be realised. These challenges include altering an understanding of curriculum as fixed and limited, and developing new models of leadership, which engage and empower teachers. This in itself suggests the need for new relationships between principals and teachers, and between teachers themselves. Appropriate models of in-service and professional development must be found which take cognisance of the individual perspectives and school context, and facilitate ongoing collaboration and evaluation at local level. Meaningful internal management structures are required that physically complement the daily schedule of the teacher and the school, and assist teachers in fulfilling the long-term curriculum leadership aspects of their role. School cultures of individualism and isolation need to be overcome before the school can truly develop as a learning organisation. Appropriate supports are required for the school principal in promoting this type of leadership from within and outside the school.

As we witness the emergence of layered management structures in larger schools, involving the principal, deputy principal, assistant principals and special duties postholders, their potential for leading learning in the school may depend on their capacity to form mutually respectful relationships that empower each other to learn and grow. This in turn needs to be assisted by meaningful and supportive structures within the school which facilitate teacher learning and encourage all teachers to take on posts, with curricular responsibilities clearly outlined. In this regard the revised in-school management structures may require further revision to remove the anomalies, lack of clarity and inequities outlined earlier. The role of the School Board and the training required for Board Members to support postholders in schools needs to be identified and supported by the Department who also have a responsibility to support

and acknowledge teacher learning, including financial supports and recognised certification for *all* relevant study and in-service undertaken. School management and principals too must look at their postholders and teachers as a resource worth investing in and empowering. The postholders themselves need to engage with the broader school community in a dialogue around teaching and learning and establish local networks among postholders to share good practice and confront curricular problems together. Specific training for principals and postholders in leading curriculum, and provision of appropriate supports through the Education Centres, the Cuiditheoir Service and the Inspectorate is essential. If postholders are to truly realise their role in curriculum leadership they need to be supported and encouraged by the educational system within their school, at local level and by a national structure that encourages their ongoing professional development. Postholders may then lead their schools to face the challenges of the future with confidence.

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APPENDIX 1-POSTHOLDER

<div align="right">

52 River Forest View,

Leixlip,

Co.Kildare.

Ph.- 01-6242497.

Mob.086-8158562.

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Dear _____.

I am currently conducting some research work as part of my thesis in N.U.I. Maynooth. My research question is examining the factors that influence the level of curriculum leadership among postholders. Following our telephone conversation please find enclosed a list of the broad areas I hope to cover with you in our interview on _____ at _____ .The contents of the interview are strictly confidential and no school or individual is identified. If you have any questions or queries regarding this please contact me beforehand at either of the numbers listed above. Looking forward to talking with you then.

<div align="right">

Yours sincerely,

_____

Michael Maher

</div>

****

Interview No. ____

Background details

1. Male ☐   Female ☐

2. Age   21-30 ☐   31-40 ☐   41-50 ☐   51-60 ☐   61-70 ☐

3. Qualifications
     N.T. ☐   B.Ed ☐   M.Ed. ☐   H.Dip.in Ed.Man. ☐   B.A. ☐

Other _____

Governing Circular

4. How long have you been a postholder?

0-5 years ☐   5-10 years ☐   10-15 years ☐   5-20 years ☐   >20 years ☐

5. Were you the most senior teacher who applied?

Yes ☐   No ☐

6. How many other teachers applied for the post? ☐

Curriculum Responsibility

7. Do you have an area of curricular responsibility (subject)? _____

8. If so is this responsibility shared with another post-holder?   Yes ☐   No ☐

Distribution of duties

9. What other duties are included in your post?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. School Type

Junior ☐   Senior ☐   Vertical ☐

Boys ☐   Girls ☐   Co-Ed ☐

Disadvantaged ☐   Non-disadvantaged ☐

Catholic ☐ Multi-D ☐ Gaelscoil ☐ Church of Ireland ☐ Special School ☐

11. School staffing and enrolment

How many teachers are in the school?

Male ☐   Female ☐   Mainstream ☐   Support ☐

☐

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How many pupils are in the school?

12.How many postholders are in the school? ☐

Male ☐ Female ☐ DP ☐ AP ☐ SD ☐ A ☐ B ☐

13. Is there a written schedule of duties for all posts in the school?

Yes ☐ No ☐

****

Areas to be discussed.

The questions below are a selection of the broad areas I hope to cover. The questions will be semi-structured (not followed rigidly) and the interview should not take longer than one hour.

Question 1: Introductory

Tell me about your teaching career up to now…..

Have there been any particular areas of curricular interest….

What are your main interests outside of school ?

Question 2:

Have schools changed since you began teaching?

How has curriculum changed?

Question 3:

Tell me about your post……..

How would you describe your duties?

How were they arrived at?

Is your post subject to annual review?

Do you meet with other postholders during the year?

Formally ? Informally? Selectively?

Question 4: What does your post involve in practice? To what extent are you supported by other staff in leading and co-ordinating your curricular area? Do you have access to adequate resources , time etc.?

Question 5: Are you satisfied with the posts structure as it is currently constituted under the governing circular (7/03)?

What opportunities for training and professional development have you encountered in relation to your post?

Question 6: Are there any factors particular to your school that support/constrain curricular leadership among postholders?

Question 7: In fulfilling your post do you have contact with other schools, cluster groups, agencies, education centres etc.?

Question 8. Have the inservice days and the Cuiditheoir service provided to schools (Revised Primary Curriculum) assisted you as teacher? As postholder?

If so, in what way, and do you think these benefits will be sustained in schools?

Has the School Development Planning Initiative had any effect in this regard?

Question 9.

From your perspective what additional supports/conditions/structures might be beneficial to the development of curriculum leadership among postholders?

In this context what are the key challenges ?

Are there any other influencing factors ?

****

Thank you for your time in facilitating this interview.

APPENDIX 2-PRINCIPAL

<div align="right">

52 River Forest View,

Leixlip,

Co.Kildare.

Ph.- 01-6242497.

Mob.086-8158562.

</div>

Dear _____ ,

I am currently conducting some research work as part of my thesis in N.U.I. Maynooth. My research question is examining the factors that influence the level of curriculum leadership among postholders. Following our telephone conversation please find enclosed a list of the broad areas I hope to cover with you in our interview on _____ at _____.The contents of the interview are strictly confidential and no school or individual is identified. If you have any questions or queries regarding this please contact me beforehand at either of the numbers listed above. Looking forward to talking with you then.

<div align="right">

Yours sincerely,

_____

Michael Maher

</div>

■■

Background details

1. Male ☐   Female ☐

2. Age 21-30 ☐   31-40 ☐   41-50 ☐   51-60 ☐   61-70 ☐

3. Qualifications

   N.T. ☐   B.Ed ☐   M.Ed. ☐   H.Dip.in Ed.Man. ☐   B.A. ☐

   Other _____

Appointment to principalship

4. How long have you been a principal?

0-5 years ☐   5-10 years ☐   10-15 years ☐   5-20 years ☐   >20 years ☐

5. Were you appointed from within?

Yes ☐   No ☐

6. How many other teachers from within were interviewed for the post? ☐

School Type
7.
Junior ☐   Senior ☐   Vertical ☐

Boys ☐   Girls ☐   Co-Ed ☐

Disadvantaged ☐   Non-disadvantaged ☐

Catholic ☐ Multi-D ☐ Gaelscoil ☐ Church of Ireland ☐ Special School ☐

8. How many teachers are in the school? ☐

Male ☐   Female ☐   Mainstream ☐   Support ☐

9.How many postholders are in the school? ☐

Male ☐   Female ☐   DP ☐ AP ☐   SD ☐   A ☐   B ☐

****

Areas to be discussed in the interview

The questions below give a broad guide to the areas to be discussed and will <u>not</u> be

followed rigidly. The interview should not take longer than one hour.

Question 1: Introductory

Tell me about your teaching career up to now and any particular areas of curricular interest....

What were your duties as a postholder, prior to principalship?

Question 2:

Have schools changed since you began teaching?

How has curriculum changed?

Question 3:

How would you describe the duties carried out by the postholders in this school?

How were they arrived at? Are these posts subject to annual review?

Do you meet with postholders during the year? Formally ? Informally? Selectively?

Question 4:

How do the postholders carry out their duties in practice? To what extent are the postholders supported by other staff in leading and co-ordinating curricular development?

Question 5:

Are you satisfied with the posts structure as it is currently constituted under the governing circular (7/03)?

Question 6:

Are there any factors particular to this school that support/constrain curricular leadership among postholders?

Question 7:

Do the postholders have contact with other schools, agencies, education centres etc.?

Question 8.
Has the inservice provided to schools (Revised Primary Curriculum) assisted the development of curriculum leadership among postholders?

If so, in what way, and do you think these benefits will be sustained in schools?

Has the School Development Planning Initiative had any effect in this regard?

Question 9.

From your perspective what additional supports/conditions/structures might be beneficial to the development of curriculum leadership among postholders?

In this context what are the key challenges facing the principal?

Are there any other influencing factors ?

****

Thank you for facilitating this interview.

APPENDIX 3-CUIDITHEOIR

52 River Forest View,

Leixlip,

Co.Kildare.

Ph.- 01-6242497.

Mob.086-8158562.

Dear _____ ,

I am currently conducting some research work as part of my thesis in N.U.I. Maynooth. My research question is examining the factors that influence the level of curriculum leadership among postholders. Following our telephone conversation please find enclosed a list of the broad areas I hope to cover with you in our interview on _____ at _____ .The contents of the interview are strictly confidential and no school or individual is identified. If you have any questions or queries regarding this please contact me beforehand at either of the numbers listed above. Looking forward to talking with you then.

Yours sincerely,

_____

Michael Maher

■■■

The interview will be in semi-structured format (i.e the questions listed below will not be followed rigidly and represent the broad areas to be discussed.)

Section A

Summary of the areas in the postholder's interview schedule as laid out in **Appendix 1** (with the exception of Qs.8 and 10), in the context of the cuiditheoir's 'previous life' as a postholder.

Section B

Question 1.

From your engagement with schools through the inservice days and the cuiditheoir service to what extent do you think postholders are fulfilling their curricular leadership roles in schools?

Question 2.

Have you found their levels of engagement with curriculum development to be reasonably consistent across schools?

Question 3.

What do you perceive as the key factors that help determine the extent to which the postholder leads curriculum development in their school?

Question 4.

Do you think the inservice provided to schools has assisted the development of curriculum leadership among postholders?

If so, in what way and do you think these benefits will be sustained in schools?

Question 5.

From your perspective what additional supports/conditions might be beneficial to the development of curriculum leadership?

In this context what are the key challenges facing schools?

Thank you for facilitating this interview